

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound



SONG AND DANCE MEN: JOEL AND ETHAN COEN ON

INSIDE LLEWYN DAVIS

PLUS

MARTIN SCORSESE'S 'THE WOLF OF WALL STREET'

- STEVE MCQUEEN ON '12 YEARS A SLAVE' ● ROBERT ALTMAN'S 'THE LONG GOODBYE'
- THE S&S INTERVIEW: GEORGE A. ROMERO ● DAVID O. RUSSELL'S 'AMERICAN HUSTLE'

£4.50



THE FIRST OSCAR® WINNER KICKS OFF THE NEW YEAR

● EUREKA ENTERTAINMENT PRESENT THEIR FIRST RELEASES OF 2014 ●



A MASTERPIECE

Dual format edition (contains both Blu-ray and DVD)
January 27th



★★★★ The Daily Telegraph ★★★★★ Time Out ★★★★★ The Independent

Dual format edition (contains both Blu-ray and DVD) Blu-ray and Ltd Edition Blu-ray Steelbook versions available.
January 20th



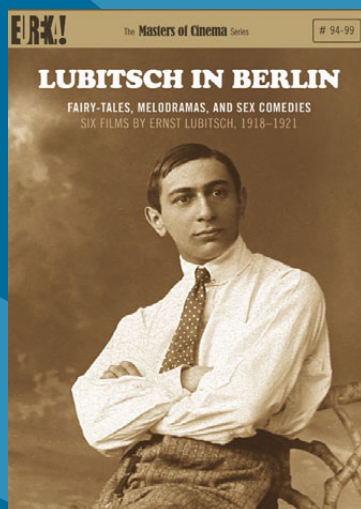
AL PACINO'S FINEST HOUR

February 24th



FULLER AT HIS MOST PROVOCATIVE

Dual format edition (contains both Blu-ray and DVD)
March 24th



REISSUED IN NEW SLIMLINE PACKAGING

Six DVD box set
February 10th



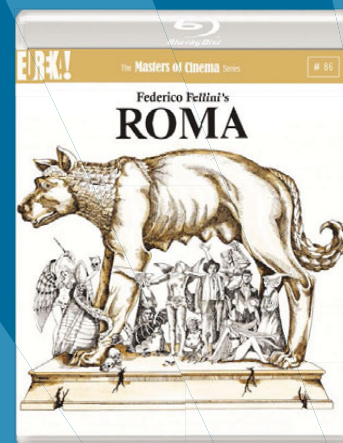
ROD STEIGER SHINES

Dual format edition (contains both Blu-ray and DVD)
March 17th



A LOST MASTERPIECE

Dual format edition (contains both Blu-ray and DVD)
March 31st



ONE OF FELLINI'S GREATEST FILMS

Special edition Blu-ray
February 17th



Over 20,000 books sold and
70,000 Kindle downloads
From the director of Phantasm
Blu-ray & DVD - February 17th



EUREKA!

The
Masters of Cinema
Series

f /eurekaentertainment

t /eurekavideo

amazon.co.uk



Birth of a salesman

For all its echoes of his previous work, Scorsese's *The Wolf of Wall Street* sees the director expand his range, and capture the American zeitgeist as strongly as *Goodfellas*. By **Ian Christie**

REGULARS

5 **Editorial** On the aftermath of polls

Rushes

- 6 **Richard Williams** on Miles Davis's score for Louis Malle's *Lift to the Scaffold*
- 8 **Object Lesson:** **Hannah McGill** on period dramas
- 9 **The Five Key...** Al Pacino performances
- 10 **Trevor Johnston** talks to superfly guy Eric Steel
- 13 **Dispatches:** **Mark Cousins** has no worries about being critical

The Industry

- 14 **Development Tale:** **Charles Gant** on *Dallas Buyers Club*
- 15 **The Numbers:** **Charles Gant** on a lean year for foreign film
- 16 **Brewster:** **Ben Roberts** has some friendly advice for the Bifas
- 19 **Profile:** **Nick Roddick** meets Alejandro Ramírez Magaña of Mexico's global cinema chain Cinépolis

Festivals

- 20 **Nick Bradshaw** on the world's largest doc festival, Amsterdam's IDFA
- 21 **Isabel Stevens** revels in the spirit of innovation at Copenhagen's CPH: DOX

Wide Angle

- 56 **Aaron Cutler** on Júlio Bressane's cinema of the subconscious
- 58 **Artists' Moving Image:** **Charlie Fox** enters the queasily playful world of Emily Wardill
- 59 **Primal Screen:** **David Robinson** hails Chaplin, supertramp
- 60 **Michael Pattison** at the Seville European Film Festival
- 61 **Soundings:** **Frances Morgan** on Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames*

Letters

Endings

- 112 **Kim Newman** explodes *Kiss Me Deadly*

FEATURES

22

COVER FEATURE

Inside the wheel

The Coen brothers' *Inside Llewyn Davis* follows a folk-singing protagonist trying to hang tough in the face of despair in the early 1960s. By **Nick James PLUS Frances Morgan** talks to music producer T Bone Burnett about recreating the world of Greenwich Village through song

28

A history of violence

In *12 Years a Slave*, the true story of a black man forced into slavery in America's Deep South, Steve McQueen puts into practice his belief that 'if you don't see it visually, mentally, psychologically, physically, then there's no picture'. By **Jonathan Romney**

34

Street legal

The shabby, mumbling insomniac of Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* is one of the more memorable cinematic incarnations of Marlowe to walk Chandler's mean streets. By **Kim Newman**

38

Shooting the past

In *Journal de France* the great French photographer and documentarist Raymond Depardon tours France in a camper van, while looking back at half a century spent observing the world. By **Kieron Corless**

46

Revolution in design

Though Soviet art is often dismissed as dreary propagandist kitsch, in the 1920s Russian designers revolutionised the art of the film poster, bringing new techniques and a dizzying dynamism to the form. By **Isabel Stevens**

50

THE S&S INTERVIEW:

George A. Romero

As his classic *Creepshow* is rereleased on Blu-ray, the king of the zombies recalls a life spent among the undead. By **James Blackford**



**"A Cambodian memoir/documentary
of force, intelligence and
terrible beauty"**

Nigel Andrews, THE FINANCIAL TIMES



WINNER, UN CERTAIN REGARD
CANNES FILM FESTIVAL 2013

**"An unshakable testament to the power
of memory... tremendously daring...
Unmissable"**

Joshua Rothkopf, TIME OUT NEW YORK

CATHERINE DUSSART PRESENTS

THE MISSING PICTURE

A FILM BY RITHY PANH

**"This haunting, at times shocking
movie...creates an image of madness,
specifically the Khmer Rouge's rule
over Cambodia in the 1970s"**

Manohla Dargis, THE NEW YORK TIMES

**"A profoundly personal
meditation on a culture devastated...
by near-unimaginable cruelty and
violence... The result is moving and
remarkably resonant."**

Geoff Andrew, SIGHT & SOUND



IN CINEMAS 3 JANUARY 2014

new wave films

www.newwavefilms.co.uk

MEDIA

CURZON FILM WORLD

NEW RELEASES



SCOTT McGEHEE
& DAVID SIEGEL
**WHAT MAISIE
KNEW**

A keen and truthful
examination of complex
family relationships, this
heartfelt, moving and
intelligent drama, built
around a stunning ensemble
cast including Julianne
Moore, Steve Coogan and
Alexander Skarsgård, has
won over critics and
audiences alike.

**"One of the best
films of 2013"**

Rex Reed,
The New York Observer



ROGER MICHELL
LE WEEK-END

Written by best-selling
author Hanif Kureishi and
featuring scintillating
performances from its
award-winning cast
(Jim Broadbent, Lindsay
Duncan & Jeff Goldblum)
this is a witty, whip-smart,
honest and poignant drama
especially for grown-ups.

**"The whole movie,
beautifully judged,
keeps surprising us...
a small, perfectly
formed triumph"**

Nigel Andrews, Financial Times

AVAILABLE ON DVD, BLU-RAY & ON DEMAND 6 JANUARY

AVAILABLE ON DVD, BLU-RAY & ON DEMAND 10 FEBRUARY

Order now at **amazon.co.uk**

Free Super Saver Delivery and Unlimited One-Day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available.
Terms and Conditions apply. See Amazon.co.uk for details.

(incorporating Monthly Film Bulletin)
Published monthly by the BFI

Editorial enquiries

21 Stephen Street London W1T 1LN
t: 020 7255 1444
f: 020 7580 5830
w: bfi.org.uk/sightandsound
e: S&S@bfi.org.uk

Social media

f: facebook.com/SightSoundmag
t: twitter.com/SightSoundmag

Subscriptions

t: 020 8955 7070
e: sightandsound@alliance-media.co.uk
Volume 24 Issue 2 (NS)
ISSN 0037-4806 USPS 496-040

CONTRIBUTORS

Geoff Andrew is head of Film Programme at BFI Southbank

James Blackford is a DVD and Blu-ray producer at the BFI

Michael Brooke is a freelance writer and DVD/Blu-ray producer

Ian Christie is former president of Europa Cinemas and teaches at Birkbeck College and Palacky University, Olomouc. He is co-editor of *Scorsese on Scorsese* and his most recent book is *Audiences*

Mark Cousins is a critic and filmmaker

Aaron Cutler works as a programming aide for the São Paulo International Film Festival

Charlie Fox is a freelance critic

Charles Gant is film editor at *Heat* magazine

Pamela Hutchinson blogs about silent cinema at silentlondon.co.uk

Trevor Johnston writes on film for *Time Out* and the *Script Factory*

Philip Kemp is a freelance critic and film historian

Hannah McGill is a freelance writer and critic

Henry K. Miller has edited a selection of writings by Raymond Durnat, to be published by the BFI/Palgrave Macmillan in 2014

Frances Morgan is deputy editor of *The Wire*

Kim Newman's latest novel is *Anno Dracula – Johnny Alucard*

Michael Pattison is a freelance film critic

David Robinson's books include *Chaplin: His Life and Art*

Nick Roddick is the author of several books on cinema

Jonathan Romney is a freelance film critic and filmmaker

Kate Stables is a freelance film critic

Richard Williams's books include *The Death of Ayrton Senna* and *The Blue Moment*. He writes about music at www.thebluemoment.com

COVER

Joel and Ethan Coen, photographed by Julian Anderson

NEXT ISSUE

on sale 11 February

Contents Reviews

FILMS OF THE MONTH

- 64 *American Hustle*
- 66 *Dallas Buyers Club*
- 68 *The Invisible Woman*
- 70 *Teenage*

FILMS

- 72 *After Tiller*
- 72 *Age of Uprising/ Michael Kohlhaas*
- 73 *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues*
- 74 *The Armstrong Lie*
- 75 *August: Osage County*
- 76 *The Best Man Holiday*
- 76 *Black Nativity*
- 77 *The Book Thief*
- 78 *Bullett Raja*
- 78 *Crystal Fairy & the Magical Cactus and 2012*
- 79 *Delivery Man*
- 80 *Getaway*
- 80 *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*
- 81 *Inside Llewyn Davis*
- 82 *Journal de France*
- 83 *Killing Oswald*
- 84 *Kiss the Water*
- 84 *Labor Day*
- 85 *Lone Survivor*
- 86 *Moon Man/Der Mondmann*
- 86 *Moshi Monsters: The Movie*
- 88 *Oldboy*
- 89 *Out of the Furnace*
- 89 *The Patrol*
- 90 *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*
- 91 *12 Years a Slave*
- 92 *The Wolf of Wall Street*

HOME CINEMA

- 96 *Baby Peggy: The Elephant in the Room, Bus Stop, Creepshow, Dark Days, Far From Vietnam, Fireworks Wednesday, Guest Wife, Intolerance, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, The Land of Hope, The Phantom of the Opera, Weekend of a Champion*
- DVD features**
- 94 **Geoff Andrew** is astonished by the range of *The Complete Eric Rohmer*
- 97 **Pamela Hutchinson** on the majestic flight scenes in William Wellman's *Wings*
- Television**
- 100 *An Age of Kings, The Following – Season 1, Spyship*
- Lost and found**
- 102 **Charlie Fox** on the forgotten youth of Reagan-era America in *Streetwise*

BOOKS

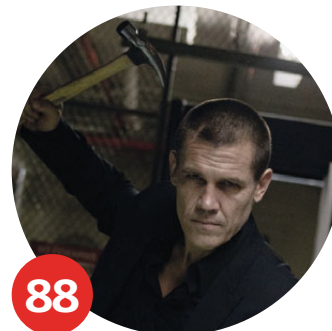
- 104 **Michael Brooke** enjoys a study of Joe Dante's career
- 105 **Henry K. Miller** on Mark Kermode's *Hatchet Job*
- 106 **Jonathan Romney** gets lost in a study of Kubrick's *The Shining*
- 106 **Philip Kemp** admires Christopher Frayling's monograph on *The Innocents*



66



75



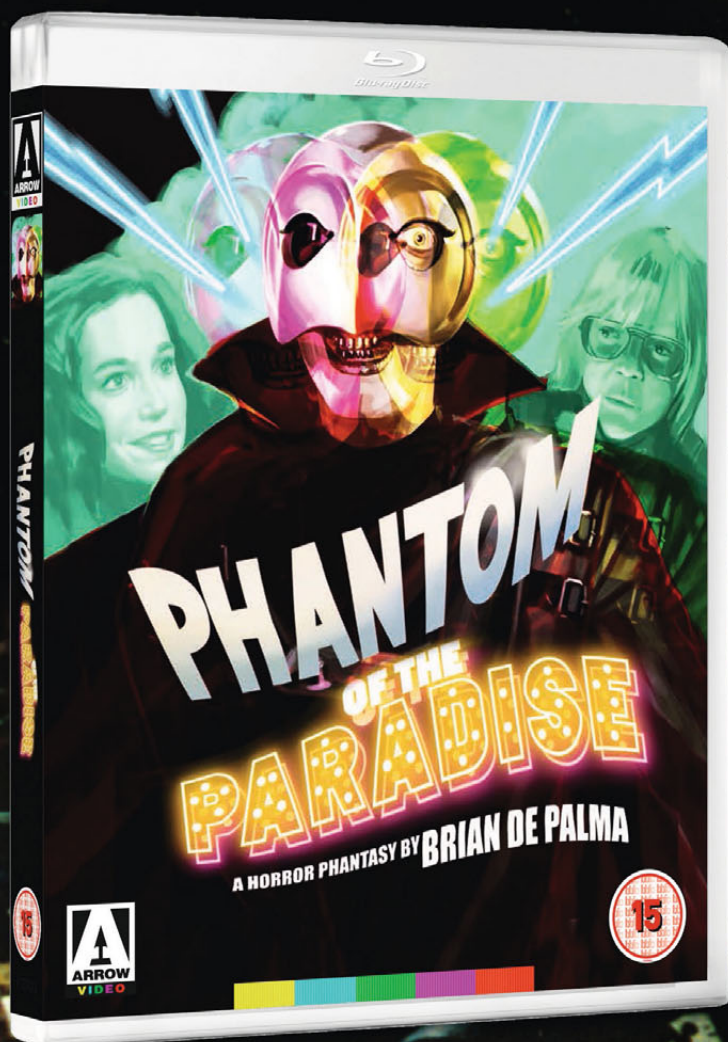
88



64

And online this month Remembering Peter Wintonick | Editing to Mary Poppins | George Cukor's *It Should Happen to You* | the British Animation Awards and more bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

BRIAN DE PALMA'S INSPIRED ROCK'N'ROLL FUSION OF *FAUST*,
THE *PHANTOM OF THE OPERA* AND *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*!



Boasting an Oscar-nominated score by Paul Williams who also stars as an evil record producer, Brian De Palma's brilliant and underseen film is available for the first time on Blu-ray in the UK! Gloriously remastered by Twentieth Century Fox and featuring a host of special features including a feature length documentary with the cast and crew, a newly produced featurette exploring the changes made to the film in post-production and much more!

AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY 17TH FEBRUARY

hmv

For the latest information on forthcoming releases visit:



/ ArrowVideo



/ @ArrowFilmsVideo



/ ArrowVideoUK

www.arrowfilms.co.uk



EDITORIAL

Editor

Nick James

Deputy editor

Kieron Corless

Features editor

James Bell

Web editor

Nick Bradshaw

Production editor

Isabel Stevens

Chief sub-editor

John Wrathall

Sub-editors

Robert Hanks

Jane Lamcraft

Jamie McLeish

Ben Walters

Researchers

Mar Diestro-Dópido

Credits supervisor

Patrick Fahy

Credits associate

Kevin Lyons

Pieter Sonke

James Piers Taylor

Design and art direction

chrisbrowndesign.com

Origination

Altimage

Printer

Wyndeham Group

BUSINESS

Publisher

Rob Winter

Publishing coordinator

Brenda Fernandes

Advertising consultant

Ronnie Hackston

Tel: 020 7957 8916

Mobile: 07799 605 212

Fax: 020 7436 2327

Email: ronnie.hackston@bfi.org.uk

Newsstand distribution

Cornag Specialist

Tel: 01895 433800

Bookshop distribution

Central Books

Tel: 020 8986 4854

Sight & Sound (ISSN 0037-4806) is published monthly by British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN and distributed in the USA by Mail Right Int., 1637 Stelton Road B4, Piscataway, NJ 08854. Periodicals Postage Paid at Piscataway, NJ and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sight and Sound c/o Mail Right International Inc. 1637 Stelton Road B4, Piscataway NJ 08854.

Subscription office:

For subscription queries and sales of back issues and binders contact:

Subscription Department

Sight & Sound

Abacus e-Media

3rd Floor Chancery Exchange

10 Furnival Street, London, EC4A 1AB

Tel: 020 8955 7070

Fax: 020 8421 8244

Email: sightandsound@alliance-media.co.uk

Annual subscription rates:

UK £45, Eire and ROW £68

£10 discount for BFI members



Copyright © BFI, 2013

The views and opinions expressed in the pages of this magazine or on its website are those of the author(s) and are not necessarily those of the BFI or its employees. The contents of this magazine may not be used or reproduced without the written permission of the Publisher.

The BFI is a charity, (registration number 287780), registered at 21 Stephen St, London, W1T 1LN



Editorial Nick James



ON THE AFTERMATH OF POLLS

Our 'Best Films of 2013' poll, published last issue, launched *S&S* to the top of Google's search engine and was widely read, debated and enjoyed. Yet for me, despite its success, there was something odd about it. I say that not because *The Act of Killing* – a controversial documentary I happen not to like much – won the poll, nor because *Gravity*, a Hollywood blockbuster, was runner-up; nor, may I add, was there anything wrong with the voting. No, my unease has more to do with 1) an anxiety about the place of specialist and arthouse cinema in the wider consumption of film, 2) a wider concern about the shifting sands of critical consensus around films, and 3) a dissatisfaction with our own precepts and timings, given how late front-runners in the awards season are released these days.

As regards the first, we can look with foreboding at Charles Gant's analysis of the performance of subtitled films in the UK in 2013 (see page 15). I had thought that such films might have been less well represented in this year's poll, but a brief check demonstrates that *S&S* end-of-year poll lists tend to be split roughly 50-50 between subtitled and non-subtitled films, and this year was no different. It would be a much more serious concern were the creeping lack of exposure for non-anglophone films to begin to affect our results – something we'll watch out for in the coming year.

The second worry is more nebulous. As I've argued before, the swirling film commentary being endlessly regenerated online undermines a film's reputation as fast as it builds it. Few recent films have received unequivocal support; the counter-possé is always ready to chip away at their standing. This is perhaps a natural process, but it happens faster and more visibly than ever before. It made me wonder if my unease had come about because we'd asked too many new writers to contribute.

This idea turned out to be completely wrong. The individual lists are as rigorous and impeccably peculiar to their authors as ever. What did seem clear was a general reluctance to vote for films that might be seen as being somehow middlebrow or related to good causes: there was not much joy, for instance, either for *Inside Llewyn Davis* or *12 Years a Slave*, films that might do well in the US awards season. That said, at the time of our poll neither film had yet been widely viewed, and both might have done better with critics had the poll been taken a month or two later.

In the weeks since we published our poll and before the end of 2013 we've had opportunities to see many films that perhaps ought to have featured in our list

THE FOLLOWING PREVIEW ARE FOR FILMS
THAT WOULD HAVE FEATURED IN OUR
BEST OF 2013 POLL
IF THEY'D BOTHERED TO RELEASE THEM IN TIME



The third worry is indicative of a new problem. In the weeks since we published our poll and before the end of 2013 we've had opportunities to see many films that perhaps ought to have featured in our list – to name only the most high profile, Spike Jonze's *Her* (though one contributor did post a very early vote for that), Martin Scorsese's *The Wolf of Wall Street*, Lars von Trier's *Nymphomaniac* and David O. Russell's *American Hustle*. At least two of these titles might have made my top five had I seen them in time.

Being 'The International Film Magazine', we've long had a relaxed attitude to the choices our contributors make. They can base them on whatever films they saw in the given year and need not worry about whether those choices were released in the UK, or indeed any other territory, in 2013. It has always seemed like an honest way of reflecting differences in the filmgoing experience, and it gives us the chance to write about films that are exciting us and will be released in the coming year.

So what's behind my beef? I wouldn't say that our poll isn't strong; it's more that happenstance couldn't have been better organised to make it look somehow premature. Then again, I don't like the alternative approaches we could use. To restrict the poll to films released in the UK in one year would be annoying for our overseas readers, and feel parochial to our writers. So I'm hoping 2013 was a one-off, that some of the late-screened films will do well in our 2014 poll, that there will be fewer important late-screened films this coming December, and that this year's productions from around the world will give all that Oscar-bait some serious competition again. **S**

IN THE FRAME

ALL THAT JAZZ



Hanging on the telephone: Jeanne Moreau in Louis Malle's *Lift to the Scaffold*

Miles Davis's moody soundtrack for *Lift to the Scaffold* proved a turning point, freeing him from the conventions of modern jazz

By Richard Williams

By 1957 Hollywood had woken up to the potential of jazz musicians as sources of atmospheric soundtracks for movies about drug addicts and crooked press agents, but it took a 24-year-old French director making his first film to recognise the potent reaction that could occur through a more organic relationship between *film noir* and the sound of modern jazz. It was Louis Malle who, with *Lift to the Scaffold* (*Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*), blended the ingredients together in perfect proportions.

One of those films that foreshadowed the New Wave, and a striking debut for its young director, *Lift to the Scaffold* possesses a third layer of significance: it proved to be a turning point in the musical history of Miles Davis, the great trumpeter who supplied Malle with his soundtrack while on tour with his group in France. Not until many years later was it fully realised how the music Davis made for the film served to alter his entire approach to music, liberating him from the conventional structures of modern jazz and leading directly to *Kind of Blue* (1959), which would become the bestselling album in the history of jazz.

Malle had finished shooting by the time Davis arrived in France, where he played a series of concerts and club dates with a quintet specially assembled for the tour. It included one other American, the experienced drummer Kenny Clarke, who had played with Davis at the 1949 Paris Jazz Festival and returned in 1956 to make the city his home. The other members of the touring quintet were young Frenchmen: the pianist René Urtreger and the bassist Pierre Michelot, both of whom had played with Davis during a visit a year earlier, and Barney Wilen, a 20-year-old prodigy of the tenor saxophone.

Davis adored Paris. In 1949, aged 23, he had fallen in love not just with the freedom of Left Bank society but with its beautiful symbol, Juliette Gréco. At the urging of Jean-Paul Sartre, he seriously considered staying and

Derek Jarman

The 20th anniversary of the death of Derek Jarman (right) is being marked with numerous events, including a full retrospective of his films throughout February and March at BFI Southbank, London, and an exhibition at Somerset House, London (23 January – 9 March).



Slapstick Festival

The tenth edition of Bristol's film comedy festival (24-26 January) celebrates the centenary of Charlie Chaplin's much-loved Tramp (right), with, among other events, a screening of 'City Lights' with a live orchestra. Other highlights include the premiere of the rediscovered Buster Keaton film 'The Gorilla Man' (1950) plus footage from his 'The Blacksmith' (1922).



ON OUR
RADAR



Horn of plenty: Miles Davis during the recording of the score

marrying the singer and living in a country that seemed to be exhilaratingly free of the sort of prejudice he experienced at home. Such a move, however, would have taken him too far out of the mainstream of jazz at a time when his career was developing, and he decided to return to New York.

That career was going well when he returned in the last week of November 1957. He had come through a bout of heroin addiction and signed a contract with Columbia Records, a major label willing to give him the resources and the promotion that would eventually make him the best-known jazz musician of his generation. And he was looking beyond the orthodox routines of jazz, searching for a way to escape the formal limitations of the Broadway popular song and the 12-bar blues, which provided his regular band's repertoire, and towards a less restrictive form of improvisation based on scales and modes. Providentially, *Lift to the Scaffold* gave him the opportunity to try out the new approach.

Marcel Romano, Davis's European promoter, had been planning to make a short film about the group, using an apprentice director, Jean-Paul Rappeneau, who was enthusiastic about jazz. Rappeneau was already working as an assistant on *Lift to the Scaffold* and suggested that Davis might be ideal for the soundtrack. Romano and Malle got together, and the invitation was issued to Davis on his arrival in Paris.

On the first night of their tour, the quintet played to a sold-out house at the Olympia music hall. Backstage, Davis and Gréco met once again.

Four days later he and the musicians were in a darkened Poste-Parisien studio, watching the scenes for which Malle required music.

Davis had wanted to know about the plot and the characters, and the director provided a few ideas about the kind of music he had in mind. Jeanne Moreau, the film's star, and Sacha Distel were present to lend encouragement. The musicians improvised to the looped scenes, using the sketches of melody, harmony and rhythm that Davis had provided. Within four hours, the job had been completed and the moody elegance of Miles Davis's trumpet would become as distinctive a feature of the film as Moreau's cool gaze or the scenes of night-time Paris so perfectly captured by Malle's cinematographer, Henri Decaë.

Just over an hour's worth of music had been recorded. Edited down, it was released in France as a 10-inch LP to accompany the film's appearance. But it had made a deeper mark on its creator. In René Urtreger's words, the music had "an abstract quality, like in a painting... dreamlike." That mood was maintained and further explored when Davis returned home to reassemble his regular musicians, among them the great saxophonist John Coltrane, for the sequence of small-group albums that included *Milestones* and *Kind of Blue*, whose immense influence would by no means be confined to the world of jazz. If Malle's exemplary thriller had played a part in the evolution of cinema, its role in changing music turned out to be even more profound. **S**

i *Lift to the Scaffold* is rereleased in UK cinemas on 7 February

ANATOMY OF A MOVIE THE WOLF OF WALL STREET

18% Wall Street (1987)

18% Goodfellas (1990)

14% Glengarry Glen Ross (1992)

14% The Bonfire of the Vanities (1990)

11% Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas (1998)

9% Greed (1924)

7% L'Argent (1928)

5% American Psycho (2000)

3% Duran Duran 'Rio' video (1982)

1% Citizen Kane (1941)



QUOTE OF THE MONTH BUSTER KEATON

"I always want the audience to outguess me, and then I double-cross them."



Dark Days

In the early 1990s Marc Singer spent two years living in Manhattan's train tunnels filming the homeless community there. His intimate portrait of life on the edges of society (right) returns to the big screen on 24 January, with a DVD out on 3 February.



Wake in Fright

It's one of Martin Scorsese's favourites, while Nick Cave regards it as "the best and most terrifying film about Australia in existence". Long believed to be lost, Ted Kotcheff's 1971 nightmarish thriller (right) about an outback teacher's descent into savagery has been restored and will be available on DVD and Blu-ray and be rereleased in UK cinemas in March.



Scarlett Johansson

After a few years of uninspiring, big-budget Hollywood fare, 2014 sees Johansson (right) return to more challenging roles: first, as the voice of a computer operating system who entrances Joaquin Phoenix's lonely writer in Spike Jonze's 'Her' and second, in possibly her bravest performance yet, as an alien siren, seducing and abducting lone Glaswegian men in Jonathan Glazer's 'Under the Skin'.



PERIOD DRAMAS

Menstruation remains one of cinema's last great taboos, and the humble tampon a bafflingly rare sight on screen



By Hannah McGill

"Plug it up, plug it up." So scream the locker-room bullies in Brian De Palma's 1976 *Carrie* (and its recent remake, directed

by Kimberly Peirce) at their miserable prey when she experiences her first period in the showers after gym. It's a jarring, forceful scene in a film that remains rather more emotional and unsettling than its schlocky reputation suggests. This is not only because it occurs so early in the film, enlisting that ever-effective horror-movie trick of denying the audience the comfort of a build-up and letting them know straight away that the gloves are off in terms of coming nastiness, but because of the intimate nature of Carrie's ordeal. It registers as unusually, even implausibly, unpleasant because even among the meanest of girls and even in the goriest of movies, menstruation tends to remain an unvisited taboo.

Carrie apart, how many films acknowledge that particular monthly experience of a large swathe of the population – let alone actually show that charged item, a tampon? Female characters in films might fret continually about pregnancy (indeed, a wanted or unwanted incidence thereof is one of the more likely plot developments to befall them), sexual indiscretions and contraception; might



Sex and the City

experience ailments mental and physical; might even, in the 'gross-out'-driven likes of *Bridesmaids*, undergo dramatic digestive disorders resulting in public self-soiling – but their monthly cycles are infrequently mentioned, and sanitary protection perhaps the least visible of all everyday necessities. Can we contend that this is because there's nothing very narratively interesting about menstruation? Perhaps, and yet movies give frequent attention to other physical functions and bodily experiences – excretion, consumption, masturbation, even vomiting – in the name of pushing our boundaries or bringing us close to characters' realities.

John Fawcett's *Ginger Snaps* (2000) remains

Is the menstruating woman inevitably monstrous to the wider world – even, as in 'Carrie', to her own kind?



Anatomy of Hell

oddly rare in drawing comparisons between the menstrual cycle and the similarly lunar-driven werewolf myth, with its portrayal of a teenage girl, Ginger, who turns lycanthrope upon getting her first period (but then, Fawcett did have a female scriptwriter, Karen Walton, on board). Take out tales of traumatic first periods and the tally of mentions of menstruation or its attendant paraphernalia gets even sligher. *Sex and the City* (the occasionally insightful television show, not the dire movie spin-offs it spawned) had its grown-up female characters step in to provide one another with tampons in extremis, in a moment that made them all seem suddenly more real.

For a more graphic examination of the subject, we must look to Catherine Breillat, that uncompromising chronicler of sexual desire and sexual disgust, and one of her most confronting and least celebrated works, 2003's *Anatomy of Hell*. Appalled by her own womanhood, the film's female protagonist invites a gay man (played,



First blood: Sissy Spacek's *Carrie* (top left) is tormented by Nancy Allen's Chris (top right) and the rest of her classmates in Brian De Palma's horror classic



Ginger Snaps

star Rocco Siffredi) to explore her body, in the certainty that he and all men find the female anatomy horrifying. As one of her challenges to him, she soaks a used tampon in a glass of water and then offers it to him to drink.

With this piece of arthouse gross-out, as with the whole film, Breillat offers up a double message: the audience should recoil because the female body is repugnant/the audience recoils because society tells it that the female body is repugnant. Perhaps all representations of menstruation express this duality; perhaps it's even inherent to the real-life experience. Yet while cinema has no particular problem sympathetically portraying male self-disgust – think of the sperm-as-hair-gel sequence in *There's Something About Mary* (1998) or the desultory act of masturbation that opens *American Beauty* (1999) – an everyday female physical experience remains a bridge too far for most films and filmmakers. (And, indeed, other media: a 1994 photograph by the late Corinne Day with the self-explanatory title *My Bloody Knickers* is still seized upon as evidence of her radical rawness, her willingness to shock – for all the world as if blood escaping the bounds of the body was an unusual and horrifying phenomenon, rather than a quotidian part of the female deal.)

Might we then have to argue that the odd instance of menstrual gross-out is empowering, in the sense that it places female characters in the same register of mockability as their male counterparts? The presence of a period sequence in the Jenny McCarthy vehicle *Dirty Love* (2005) has been overshadowed rather by the film being generally dismissed. But in the more credible *Superbad* (2007), a teenage boy finds himself bloodstained after being enthusiastically dirty-danced by an anonymous girl. The scene is played for horrified “eews” from its young, male target audience. Yet by refusing to deny the ickier functions of the female body, it plays as oddly positive – just as Carrie's horrible initiation into womanhood is empathetically portrayed even as it begins her transformation into a monster. Is the menstruating woman inevitably monstrous to the wider world – even, as in *Carrie*, to her own kind? Whatever the reason for the coyness around it, *Carrie's* rain of tampons serve to remind us that this most ordinary life experience is one on which cinema remains more than ordinarily plugged up. 🍷

THE FIVE KEY...

AL PACINO PERFORMANCES

Just when Pacino thought he was out, a BFI retrospective has pulled him back in. Here we select his very best work

By Nick James

Just as nothing about the quiet storm of Pacino's introduction to us as Michael Corleone in *The Godfather* – all soft-spoken watchfulness and seeming gentility – could have prepared us for the ultimate barking coke-fiend Cubano warlord he would play 11 years later in *Scarface*, so the actor's portrayals of men of violence continue to surprise us with their great range and subtlety. Of course there are more of his roles that are just as good – this is one time that ten films would not have been enough – but we've gone here for a snapshot that shows that not only is he a 'king actor' in the Wellesian definition, but one who's as light on his feet as a song and dance man.



1 The Godfather Part II (1974)

Or the one where the sweet soldier turns inward grimly and sets about restoring the authority of his father's house tenfold. This is Francis Coppola's masterpiece, cutting between a Pacino present and a De Niro past that together defined great cinema acting for all time. And Pacino's brooding Michael still carried the day.



2 Dog Day Afternoon (1975)

If his Michael Corleone nailed brooding menace, Sonny, the small-time orchestrator of the bank-heist gone wrong in Sidney Lumet's New York-set drama, best shows the other Al – the ball of unpredictable energy. Pacino is in his white-hot prime here, his Sonny among the most unforgettable characterisations in 1970s cinema.



3 Scarface (1983)

Pacino's ability to put himself 'out there' has made him a favourite subject for impressionists, and if there's one performance that nailed that view of him it's his Tony Montana in Brian De Palma's *Scarface*. This gun-totin' coke-fiend's upstart taste has decorated generations of hip-hop royalty. How iconic can an actor be?



4 Frankie and Johnny (1991)

Reunited with Michelle Pfeiffer – Montana's moll in *Scarface* – Pacino plays a short-order cook, while she's a waitress. They fall in love against the odds and win the audience, even though both look too gorgeous to need that kind of work. Convincing none the less, Pacino shows he can be big-hearted and soft without shouting.



5 Heat (1995)

The second great peak of a great career, Pacino's hyper-dedicated thief-chaser Lt Vincent Hanna is a masterfully created cop. The way he barrels around the initial crime scene, indicating what he can read from the evidence, is screen acting at its finest. The pity is that Pacino hasn't had scripts this good for a long time.

REEL LIFE

Kiss the Water director Eric Steel explains how he got hooked by the tale of an artisan artist who spent her life making anglers' flies

By Trevor Johnston

Back in 2001, Eric Steel, then a working producer with credits including Scorsese's *Bringing Out the Dead* to his name, cut out an obituary from the *New York Times* and pinned it to his corkboard. The fact that America's newspaper of record should be writing about Megan Boyd, a Scottish maker of anglers' salmon flies who lived in a tumbledown cottage outside Brora in the Highlands, was remarkable indeed, though Steel himself could hardly have imagined at that point that he'd be visiting the Edinburgh Film Festival some 12 years later with his completed, truly unique film on Boyd's singular personal history. *Kiss the Water* eschews the standard bio-doc moves to offer an imaginative evocation – illuminated by Em Cooper's beautiful hand-painted animated interludes – of a woman whose hardscrabble daily existence stands in marked contrast with the exquisite creations in feather and tinsel she crafted by the light of a paraffin lamp. In so doing, the film lures the viewer towards a telling glimpse of a life circumscribed by astringent realities yet somehow fully lived in the imagination.

Trevor Johnston: Was there an identifiable point where this changed from being an obituary on your board to a film you were actually going to direct?

Eric Steel: At the time I came across the story, I worked in the movie business but I couldn't call myself a film-maker. Directing *The Bridge*, the documentary I made about suicides on San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, changed all that, helped me learn my craft – and then my father passed away in 2009 so my sense of what remains took on a whole different vibration. I started really looking at this again, and getting seed money from Creative Scotland was really the key, to have that endorsement when really the project was pretty amorphous. We don't have anything like that in the US, you have to go out and raise every cent yourself.

TJ: Having pictured Megan Boyd's world in your mind during all that time, were you concerned that the reality might not match up?

ES: A big moment for me was walking into the derelict cottage where she lived. To me the obit I'd read was like a kind of magic spell I'd fallen for, and now I realised it wasn't all magic, that there was something very difficult about her life. Yet her spirit definitely hung in the air in that place, and when I went to the tackle shop in Helmsdale and mentioned her name, the stories were still circulating about her, like some sort of oral tradition – which I really tried to tap into for the film.

TJ: Well, that certainly comes across in how the film has us construct our own picture of Megan through the recollections of the various interviewees. Was that why you chose not to deliver the upfront biographical information and contextualising narration we might traditionally expect in this sort of biographic doc?



The fisher king: Eric Steel

ES: You could have done it in that usual A to Z format, but I kept looking at the flies and the craft of making them, how she took different feathers from different birds, added bits of fur and tinsel, and put them together in a way which was deceptively seamless. For me, that had to be the creative DNA of the film, so while there is that element of her lifeline in the film, the anecdotes and the colour, the places she knew and the animated dreamscapes all had to be woven together in such a way that you're lured in and don't quite realise the barb on the end of the hook.

TJ: Yet for all the facts of her fairly tough daily lot, what's extraordinary about this woman is the beauty that she created in something as ephemeral as a fishing fly – it's as if she exemplifies some human need for beauty, and how the imagination can transcend its surroundings...

'A big moment was walking into her cottage. The obit was like a magical spell and now I realised it wasn't all magic'



Kiss the Water: Megan Boyd's derelict cottage

ES: To me it's extremely telling that she never fished. She was somehow able to create these flies, which were in demand from people all over the world, based solely on her imaginative investment in the act of fishing. It was as if she dreamed [so vividly] of these flies luring the salmon that they actually worked, so the challenge of rendering this on film was to recreate that kind of spell.

TJ: The animation certainly plays a key role in that regard, but in a post-*Waltz with Bashir* universe doc-makers often use it to portray events they have no footage of – yet here it's more a matter of artistic evocation. Was it difficult to reach that point?

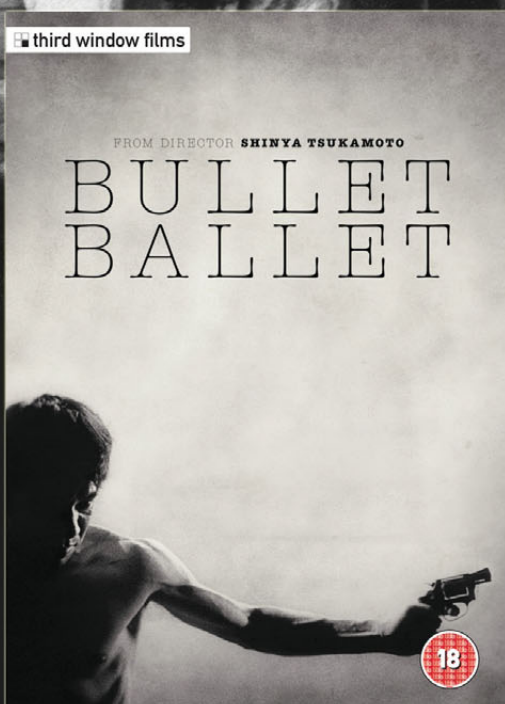
ES: I had meetings with animators from both an independent and studio background and they just didn't get it. Yet with Em Cooper, she grasped it immediately, possibly because the nature of her work, aside from its beautiful hand-painted craftsmanship, is about inhabiting the characters she portrays – so when you see Megan swimming under that water, Em has really invested into that experience herself. But the struggle to get to that final point sort of told me that not everybody was going to get this film. Not everyone has the patience to let themselves wander into this story. They want the fish, they don't want to go fishing.

TJ: Because the technological revolution around us has made us impatient consumers of images?

ES: Exactly. The romantic idea of going to the cinema – as opposed to the smelly popcorn reality these days – is about going somewhere without knowing the destination, but trusting the filmmaker to make it worthwhile. You can certainly make that comparison with fishing, which isn't just about the catch, it's about going up the river, it's about that journey out of your own head and where that takes you. ☺



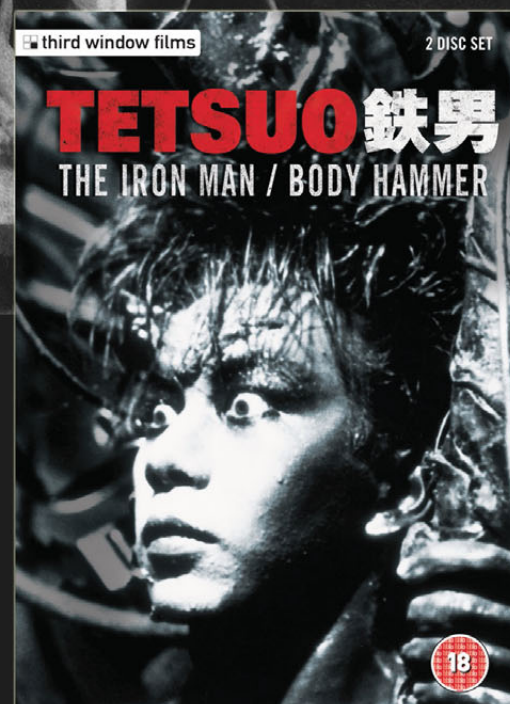
Kiss the Water is released on 10 January and is reviewed on page 84



BULLET BALLET
OUT DEC 30



TOKYO FIST
OUT NOV 25



TETSUO I & II
NOW OUT

FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER ON BLU-RAY & REMASTERED DVD!

ALL 3 FILMS **DIGITALLY REMASTERED** FROM THEIR
ORIGINAL NEGATIVES BY **SHINYA TSUKAMOTO** HIMSELF!
FEATURING **NEW INTERVIEWS** WITH TSUKAMOTO, **UNSEEN EXTRAS**
AND COLLECTABLE PACKAGING WITH NEW ILLUSTRATIONS



BFI DVD & Blu-ray

The Home of Great British Film & TV



300 titles available to buy now
bfi.org.uk

THE FILM FESTIVAL READER

Edited by **Dina Iordanova**

ISBN: 9781908437099 (hardback)

Available from all good bookshops, Amazon and at www.stafs.org
St Andrews Film Studies, 2013

What is the importance of **film festivals** in the context of **film culture** at large? What logic reigns within the **film festival** galaxy? Are **film festivals** tools of power and prestige that make or break the fate of a **film**? Or do they effectively seal diverse and unique **cinema** from the wider public whilst simultaneously professing to celebrate it? What are the key features and who are the key stakeholders of the **film festival**? What, if anything, is wrong with the concept of 'festival films'? What makes a good **film festival** good or a bad one bad? It is these and other questions that are raised and treated in the classic texts included in this anthology. With contributions from, among others, **Paul Willemen**, **Bill Nichols**, **Thomas Elsaesser**, **Daniel Dayan** and **Julian Stringer**, as well as **Mark Cousins**, **Ruby Rich**, **Sean Farnel** and **Chris Fujiwara**, the volume aims to foster the discussion and definition of the role of **film festivals** in the wider context of **film culture**.



GOTHIC

THE DARK HEART OF FILM

PART IV: LOVE IS A DEVIL
1 January – 6 February 2014

BFI SOUTHBANK
London SE1 8XT
☎ Waterloo

BOOK NOW
020 7928 3232
bfi.org.uk/gothic



Player

WATCH ON THE
NEW BFI PLAYER

SITUATION CRITICAL

The pessimists are convinced the end is nigh for film criticism in the digital age – but perhaps criticism isn't what they think it is



By Mark Cousins

Are we 'in' the internet like fish are 'in' water? Has it become the material in which we live, our lens, our medium?

Has it killed off various kinds of life, like ice ages do? Is it a nice age or a vice age?

Judging by the talk in a little bailiwick that I know – film criticism – the answer to these questions is a variation on 'yes'. Every film festival, every film magazine, every university is asking, "What's the future of film criticism in the age of the internet?"

They are overestimating the revolution, I think. The smell of gunpowder has gone to their heads. Criticism is about first-order things like creativity, knowledge, expressivity, protest, play, advocacy, enchantment, passion, activism and art. None of these were invented by the internet. Most of them are what it – the internet, a second-order thing – yearns for.

To see what I mean, think of the relationship between the critic, the text, the criticism and the world. The critic looks at the text – a film, for example – compares it to the world and then, out of this comparison, makes the criticism. She says that the text is a good one because it relates to the world well and is also somehow – because of its wit, or speed, or slowness or interiority, or surprise or sorrow – beautiful in itself. If she agrees with Terry Eagleton's *The Function of Criticism*, the critic might say that the text should criticise the world for its faults – or, at least, not replicate those faults. She'll believe that she should be wary of the world she is criticising but also not let that wariness become disillusionment. The critic, if she's any good, will have come to realise that she doesn't merely respond to art, she makes art.

Easier said than done. How does the critic make art, ie avoid banality? She begins by putting on X-ray specs. She looks inside the text/film. The Italian writer Roberto Silvestri says that a critic should "smash away the film's fuselage" to see what lies beneath. There's a great illustration in Rudolf Arnheim's book *Visual Thinking* to show what this means. He places a painting by Corot of a mother and child beside a sculpture by Henry Moore to show that, compositionally, they are exactly the same thing. He's saying that inside the Corot, there's a Moore. The critic must see what lies beneath. This is what the artist Douglas Gordon did in his work *24 Hour Psycho*. He slowed down Alfred Hitchcock's famous film – about slowness and sudden speed – to a frame a heartbeat, to reveal how it hypnotises.

So, as critics, we look at the world, see how the film relates to it, and look inside the film. All we have to do now is make the criticism. Notice that I don't say: "Write the criticism." Criticism



Film critics should play like DJs play. We should spin discs, segue from one film to another, keep the dance floor full

isn't just writing, of course. It can be an event, a place, a film, thinking, playing, defending or writing. I'll show what I mean from my own life and work, but examples abound.

Take events. 'A Pilgrimage', in which Tilda Swinton, movie audiences and I pulled a 37-tonne cinema across bits of Scotland, was film criticism. It visually expressed our sense that cinema is a collective experience, almost religious for us, and road movie-like. Last month, at the Stockholm Film Festival, another event, many of us were photographed wearing black eye-masks, to mark the fact that the Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof had not been allowed to attend the festival.

And what about places? The most eloquent act of film criticism I've experienced was the Obala cinema, which ran during Sarajevo's appalling siege, in which more than 10,000 people were killed. Obala was underground and very basic, but it defiantly insisted that, especially when times are hard, the flickering vitality of cinema makes you feel alive. Its illusion bolsters reality. Another place which is, or rather could be, a great act of movie criticism, is the former Glen cinema in Paisley in Scotland. On New Year's Eve, 1929, 71 children died in a crush inside it as the result of a panic caused by smoke from a film canister. Someone should make something brilliant about this place of horror and love.

Obviously, films can be great acts of film criticism – think of Thom Andersen's *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, Scorsese's *My Voyage to Italy* (*Il mio viaggio in Italia*), Barbara Hammer's *Devotion: A Film About Ogawa Productions* or Billy Wilder's *Sunset Blvd.* Central to this is thinking. The philosopher Karl Popper said, to paraphrase, "If I'm wrong, I'm right." He suggested that we should try to disprove what we think we know. As critics we

should take our ignorance seriously. We should think our way into those aspects of cinema with which we are unfamiliar.

Thinking and playing go well together. Film critics should play like DJs play. We should spin discs, segue from one film to another, keep the dance floor full. The critic David Thomson is a great player, dropping the 's' off the word 'movies' so that it sounds wrong, the very dissonance becoming a thought bomb. Defending can be playful too, but is the most morally serious imperative in criticism. I've said this before, but critics are defence lawyers, standing in court, representing work that has been sequestered. Film culture is not a meritocracy. The table is not level. People and movies are sidelined because of their class, race, nation, budget, gender or form.

Finally, there's the kind of criticism that I am doing now – writing. Even film writing, though, is polygenetic. Critical writing can be reviewing, books, essays and interviews, of course, but it can be letters, hypotheticals and manifestos too, and more besides. Even in my own work, this is the case. My next book, *Dear Orson Welles*, will be a series of letters to filmmakers, many of whom are dead. Chris Marker writes back to me to tell me why he liked the phrase "He wrote me". I take Welles around the world. I wrote an essay about the film that Sergei Eisenstein made about Manhattan (he didn't), and I've done manifestos: about essay films, film festival form, and the future of the movies. All of these are attempts to play with the point of view of film writing, the mode of address, the reality, the seriousness or otherwise, the expectation.

Combine play, and what we don't know, and formal invention and the desire to disrupt, and you have something like Hélène Cixous's great exhortation: "We should try and write as our dreams teach us; shamelessly, fearlessly, and by facing what is inside every human being – sheer violence, disgust, terror, shit, invention, poetry... In our dreams we are criminals; we kill... But we are also the happiest people on earth." The internet doesn't lead dreams, fear, invention, poetry or protest. It follows them. It serves them. 

DEVELOPMENT TALE

DALLAS BUYERS CLUB



Drugstore cowboy: Matthew McConaughey

Concerns over the commercial viability of a tale about an unlikely Texan Aids activist kept the project on ice for more than 20 years

By Charles Gant

It's perhaps not so surprising that a film about a Texan electrician who died of Aids would be a challenge to get made. After all, the colourful elements that attracted actors and filmmakers to *Dallas Buyers Club* – the macho rodeo fan who took on the US health establishment after being told he would die within weeks – were the same factors giving studios pause for thought.

Craig Borten first heard of Ron Woodroof when he read an article about him in 1992. Figuring that Woodroof's story "would make a great movie – my first", the writer drove down to Texas where he recorded 25 hours of audio over three days while they talked. Borten was hooked by the story of a prejudiced redneck who'd been diagnosed with HIV six years earlier, given 30 days to live and been ostracised by friends and co-workers. Woodroof's battle for the anti-viral meds he believed would extend his life saw him become an unlikely pharma smuggler and back-door salesman, community activist and advocate for patient rights.

In the mid-90s, Dennis Hopper was attached to direct Woody Harrelson in the lead role, with writer Melisa Wallack by this time helping Borten reshape the screenplay, and David Bushell (*Sling Blade*) producing. By the year 2000 the film had stalled, and the writer pair turned to their pal Robbie Brenner, a Miramax executive who had long been a champion of the project. Having failed to get any traction with her boss, Harvey Weinstein, Brenner boarded as producer, bringing on her NYU film school friend Marc Forster – who had just finished *Monster's Ball* – as director. The team screened *Monster's Ball* to Brad Pitt, who became enthusiastically attached, and the film was set up at Universal, where it remained for eight years.

Brenner explains: "It went through various permutations of the script: a little more of this storyline, a little more of that. Brad and Marc both took other movies and fell out." Along the way, Universal orchestrated rewrites from a tag team of screenwriters, including Guillermo Arriaga (*Babel*), who was reported in December 2002 to be in line for \$600,000 for his work. In June 2008, *Dallas Buyers Club* was announced as a film reteaming the director and star of *Lars and the Real Girl*: Craig Gillespie and Ryan Gosling.

Meanwhile Brenner had moved from Miramax to Twentieth Century Fox and then to Relativity. She picks up the story: "In

2009 the script reverted back to the original writers. Melisa called me, and said, 'You're never going to believe it but we got the script back and we are going to give it to you to try go get the movie made.' The first person I thought of was Matthew McConaughey. This was pre-*Mud*, *Bernie*, *Killer Joe*, any of these movies, but I just thought, he's from Texas, and he embodied all the characteristics that Ron had, and he's so likeable." The actor responded enthusiastically and Brenner turned to French-Canadian filmmaker Jean-Marc Vallée (*C.R.A.Z.Y.*, *The Young Victoria*), with whom she'd worked on a stalled project.

"Jean-Marc read the script, and he said, 'Hell yeah, let's go make this cowboy movie.' And then for two and a half years we worked at raising the financing. Because the script had been around for so long, so many people were really afraid, they just felt the script had been exposed: 'Oh nobody's going to want to do something that uncommercial.' A lot of people really liked it but weren't really willing to step in and put money up."

Borten, for one, understood the problem: "This was the elevator pitch for my film: 'It's a story about a racist homophobe with Aids who befriends a man who dresses as a woman. Then they both die.'"

The film was eventually set to go in October

2012 with an \$8 million budget from Montreal financiers, but collapsed with eight weeks to go. "I had a sneaking suspicion that the money wasn't real for a long time," says Brenner, "but I was just kind of going on hope."

"So Matthew had lost 35 pounds at this point. He said, 'You'd better get it together. I'm showing up in November to shoot this movie and you'd better have the money because it's now or never.' The walls were closing in. Matthew had another movie behind this, and he had lost the weight, he was focused, he was in Ron headspace. And we knew that it was a moving train and if it stopped suddenly it was going to be derailed for a very long time. There was no 'no' in the equation."

Brenner and her friend Rachel Winter – who had boarded in 2009 to be the hands-on producer – turned to Cassian Elwes, the former William Morris agent who is one of the best connected people in independent film financing. Via an unlikely chain of contacts, equity investment was secured from Houston-based fertiliser manufacturer Truth Chemical, then seeking to branch out into the entertainment industry. Filming was able to proceed, albeit at a reduced budget. Key roles that were previously set for Hilary Swank (as a doctor who becomes sympathetic to Woodroof) and Gael García Bernal (as his cross-dressing, drug-addicted business partner) were replaced close to shooting with Jennifer Garner and Jared Leto.

Brenner says, "When I first approached Jean-

'It's a story about a racist homophobe with Aids who befriends a man who dresses as a woman. Then they both die'

Marc he wanted 45 days to shoot the movie, and then when the budget had to come down it was 40 days, then 38, 35, 33, and he was, 'I can't go lower than 33.' And then it was 30, 28, then it became 25, and he yelled at me and said, 'No way, I'm already making this movie with my hands tied behind my back. Just take the lighting package out and we'll shoot the movie with available light, and we don't need any dollies or tripods or cranes or anything. The DP will have the camera on his shoulder the whole time.' And that's ultimately what we did: we shot the movie with all available light, in 25 days.

"Even though we had no money and not a lot of days, it was really freeing for the actors. There wasn't five, six takes per angle or per scene. They would do one take for Matthew and then the DP would run around to the other side and cover the other actor. It was literally flying through everything."

"There were times when I would try to come to the set and I didn't even know where it was. There were barely any trucks, there were no craft service tables, there was nothing. It was just people passionate about making this movie. The actors really stayed in character and it was ultimately an amazing result occurred, this perfect confluence of events." 📌

i Dallas Buyers Club is released on 7 February and is reviewed on page 66

THE NUMBERS 2013 IN REVIEW

By Charles Gant

In all the years of this column's existence, our annual reviews have seen a gently fluctuating number of non-Bollywood foreign-language films earn £1 million at the UK box office in a given year, peaking with five in both 2007 and 2008. But there's always been at least one, until now. Depressingly for stakeholders in this sector – niche distributors, exhibitors and everyone invested in developing audiences for specialised film – in 2013 not one foreign-language picture achieved seven figures here, apart from titles for the Hindi market.

Top foreign film with £895,000 is Susanne Bier's *Love Is All You Need*, which however contains a hefty amount of English dialogue, as might be expected in a movie starring Pierce Brosnan. Closing in on it with £881,000 at press time, *The Great Beauty* represents a big advance on Paolo Sorrentino's previous best result (*The Consequences of Love*: £451,000 in 2004). In contrast, *I'm So Excited* (with £848,000) is the first Pedro Almodóvar title to fall short of £1 million at the UK box office since *Live Flesh* back in 1998.

If your local arthouse cinema has been playing titles that seem suspiciously mainstream, well, there has certainly been a lot of populist fare from English-language auteur directors for them to programme. Ang Lee enjoyed a major commercial breakthrough with *Life of Pi* (released December 2012, but a sustained performer in 2013). The literary adaptation grossed £29.9 million, well ahead of Lee's previous best (*Sense and Sensibility*, £13.6 million). With *Gravity* and *Captain Phillips*, Alfonso Cuarón and Paul Greengrass achieved their best commercial results outside of the blockbuster franchises (Harry Potter, Jason Bourne) with which they were once associated.

The year also saw the biggest ever hits from



A lucrative affair: *Love Is All You Need*

both Quentin Tarantino and Woody Allen (*Blue Jasmine* took a stonking £5.1 million); and *Gravity*, *Captain Phillips* and *Django Unchained* enjoy the distinction of being the year's biggest live-action hits based on original properties, unless you count the Tarantino film as a continuation of the character played in 1966 by Franco Nero. Technically, *Captain Phillips* is based on existing material (Richard Phillips's book), but the film's success is hardly linked to audience familiarity with that source.

Although an improvement on 2012, it's been just a middling year for documentary at the UK box office, albeit boosted by concert films both mainstream (*One Direction: This Is Us*) and fairly niche (Shane Meadows's *The Stone Roses: Made of Stone* with £520,000). Also rustling up numbers in six figures: *Blackfish* (£145,000) and Ken Loach's *The Spirit of '45* (£236,000). *The Act of Killing* enjoyed the year's longest continuous run at a single cinema – 27 weeks at London's ICA – and ended the year with a very respectable box office of £119,000. 📌

FOREIGN-LANGUAGE FILMS AT UK/IRELAND BOX OFFICE, 2013

Film	Gross
Love Is All You Need	£895,451
The Great Beauty	£880,922*
I'm So Excited	£847,622
In the House	£827,081
Blue Is the Warmest Colour	£497,240*
Wadjda	£412,808
No	£345,571
Populaire	£342,522
Lore	£301,841
A Hijacking	£156,509

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SPECIALISED TITLES AT UK/IRELAND BOX OFFICE, 2013

Film	Gross
Life Of Pi	£29,928,205
Gravity	£25,763,353*
Captain Phillips	£15,805,169*
The Great Gatsby	£15,737,351
Django Unchained	£15,736,884
Philomena	£10,470,225*
Lincoln	£8,757,912
Quartet	£8,390,373
Prisoners	£7,303,670
Blue Jasmine	£5,120,999

Grosses to 15 Dec 2013; *still on release; foreign chart excludes Bollywood films; *Life of Pi* released 20 Dec 2012

BEEFING UP BIFA

BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

Does Harvey Weinstein have something to teach the British Independent Film Awards about delivering audiences?



By Ben Roberts

Recently I listened to an interview with Harvey Weinstein on Radio 4 in which he discussed his annual awards campaigns

for the Golden Globes, Baftas, Oscars and everything in between, and his line-up of 2013 candidates, including our very own *Philomena*.

Weinstein is the master of the awards season, expert in anticipating and manipulating the outcome. He is also honest about its purpose, and I was not surprised when he confessed that an awards push is not so much about recognising the highest level of creative achievement as it is about getting more people to see his films. In other words, making more money.

The awards corridor is designed to deliver a steady stream of audiences to cinemas, from the moment the first candidates start to pop up as contenders in the autumn until the winners are crowned in the New Year. No bad thing perhaps, except that the releases are designed to make the most of the corridor, meaning that many of the more fragile and less well-resourced films can face a brutal winter and will hibernate until the spring, when an increasingly brief release window appears before the summer season kicks in.

On a Sunday night in December, the first of the British awards ceremonies, the Moët British Independent Film Awards (Bifas), was held at Old Billingsgate Market in London. As ever, the reception room was fizzing. On my way into the main hall I snatched conversations with producer Gillian Berrie about the continued calamitous goings-on at Creative Scotland (more on that another time); with Ben Wheatley about his wife Amy Jump's brilliant script for an adaptation of

Bifa has reached an awkward age. The red carpet and the press line are longer, but where does it sit in the grand scheme of things?



Award winner: *Metro Manila*

J.G. Ballard's *High Rise*, and with Picturehouse's Clare Binns, who told me I could have made more of an effort to dress for the occasion.

The Bifas have ever been thus: a fun, invaluable, and occasionally raucous end-of-year party for the independent film community. Where Bafta would be the successful firstborn with the big City job and the summer house on Lake Como, Bifa is the contrary sibling who has never quite lived up to the promise of their brilliance but knows how to throw a ***king great party. But for me, Bifa has reached an awkward age. The red carpet and the press line are longer, the champagne tower is getting higher, but where does it sit in the grand scheme of things? Is it really the first award of the season or the last? Does it even fit with the rest of the awards calendar, or is it defiantly swimming against the tide?

Beyond the cork-popping and table-hopping, what struck me was how little genuine collective celebration there was amongst an otherwise typically intimate and mutually supportive community. Pockets of cheering erupted as winners were announced but, because the Bifa processes and decision-making remain something of a mystery to many, consternation befell the room upon certain announcements, and on occasion you could almost hear the rolling of eyeballs.

So my sense this year was that the Bifas need to take a moment to consider their role for the indie sector, to consolidate their achievements and their position in the calendar, and to apply their founding principles more rigorously and astutely. They should champion the underdog, but not out of petulance.

As a supporter of the event (and a funder this year, through our support of the short film award), the BFI has been discussing the ambitions of the Bifas over the past year with its brilliant and committed organisers, Tessa Collinson and Johanna von Fischer. They are hamstrung by limited resources and year-to-year uncertainty about funding (including from us), though the event's sponsorship looks in good shape.

My suggestion would be that the Bifa steering group focuses on three things next year: timing, branding and process. 1) Does the timing work to the best advantage of the nominees and winners? 2) Could Bifa branding do for film (or home cinema) releases what the Mercury Prize or Brit Awards do for music? 3) Most importantly in terms of process, I would beg the Bifa steering group to look at its selection processes and eligibility criteria. A number of barely-yet-seen and months-from-release films were buried among the nominees with technical achievement nods, and I wonder what this really achieves, either for the event and the Bifa brand, or for the nominated films.

To return to Harvey Weinstein's point, there is an opportunity for the Bifas to throw a spotlight on those films that need and deserve the recognition – *Metro Manila*, *Shell, Filth*, *The Selfish Giant* – and to deliver larger audiences for them. I hope that we and the industry will help Collinson and von Fischer to weather Bifa's growing pains so that it can become the platform we need. @bfiben

IN PRODUCTION



● **Stephen Frears**, above, has reportedly nearly completed shooting his as-yet untitled film about competitive professional cycling – a story loosely based on Lance Armstrong. Dustin Hoffman is now confirmed to have joined a cast that also includes Ben Foster, Chris O'Dowd and Guillaume Canet.

● **Frederick Wiseman's** next film is a documentary about life behind – and in front of – the scenes at London's National Gallery. The footage for the film was shot by Wiseman in winter 2012, during a break from the shooting of 2013's well-received *At Berkeley*.

● **The Coen brothers** have confirmed that there is "a good chance" that their follow-up to *Inside Llewyn Davis* will be *Hail Caesar*, a comedy in which George Clooney will star as a 1920s matinee idol who takes a part in an epic set in Ancient Rome. The film was conceived as the third in the brothers' 'Numskull Trilogy', alongside *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and *Intolerable Cruelty*, both of which also starred Clooney (*Burn After Reading*, in which Clooney only plays a supporting role, doesn't count). "It's about the movie business and life and religion and faith," Ethan Coen has said. "Faith and the movie business. It's still George."

● **Ari Folman**, the Israeli director of *Waltz with Bashir* and 2013's adaptation of Stanislaw Lem's *The Congress*, will write and direct an animated version of Anne Frank's diaries.

● **Miike Takashi**, the fearsomely prolific Japanese director still best known for his 1999 film *Audition*, is to return to the splatter violence that helped make his name, directing a live-action version of *As God Says*, a five-volume manga series by author Kaneshiro Muneyuki. *The Hunger Games*-esque story concerns a group of school kids forced by an unseen villain to participate in a series of deadly games.



● **William Friedkin**, above, is to follow the Tracy Letts adaptation *Killer Joe* with a Mae West biopic for HBO Films, based on West's memoir *Goodness Had Nothing to Do With It*. Bette Midler is set to play the queen of the acid quip and star of such racy pictures as *She Done Him Wrong* and *I'm No Angel*.



matchbox films

DVD
£9.99

"Sensitive script and excellent cast... a low-key but quietly affecting drama"

Movie Talk

"Far more accomplished than many of its bigger budget competition"

Letterboxd



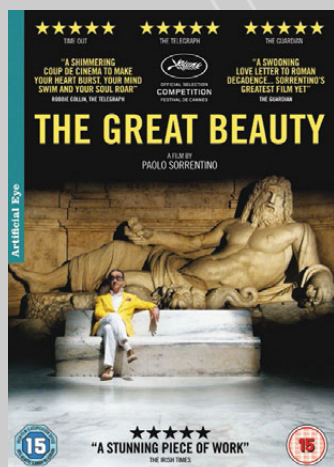
Out on DVD
January 13

available at
hmv
while stocks last

artificial-eye.com

Artificial Eye

Own The Year's Best Films



Paolo Sorrentino
The Great Beauty

At once a sumptuously shot love letter to Roman decadence and a biting satire on Berlusconi's Italy, this dazzling, dizzying and entrancing cinematic tour-de-force, built around a stunning performance by Toni Servillo (Il Divo, Gomorrah), has drawn comparisons with La Dolce Vita.

AVAILABLE ON DVD, BLU-RAY
& ON DEMAND 13 JANUARY



Clio Barnard
The Selfish Giant

This bold, gripping second feature from the visionary director of The Arbor boasts breathtaking cinematography, unforgettable performances from its two non-professional leads and immense critical acclaim, hailing it as one of the year's most important British releases.

AVAILABLE ON DVD, BLU-RAY
& ON DEMAND 27 JANUARY



Abdellatif Kechiche
Blue is the Warmest Colour

Mesmerisingly beautiful as an artistic accomplishment, jaw-droppingly frank in its explicit sexual content and utterly compelling from start to finish, the controversial yet masterful winner of this year's Palme d'Or has become one of the most talked about films of the year.

IN CINEMAS & ON DEMAND NOW
DVD & BLU-RAY COMING 2014

PRE-ORDER NOW **amazon.co.uk**

Free Super-saver Delivery and Unlimited Free One-day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available. Terms and conditions apply. See www.amazon.co.uk for details.

“A WONDERFUL
BOOK
AS ESSENTIAL
AS IT IS ENTERTAINING”

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

“A SPARKLING
ASSESSMENT
OF SOME OF CINEMA'S
MOST ICONIC
INANIMATE
STARS”

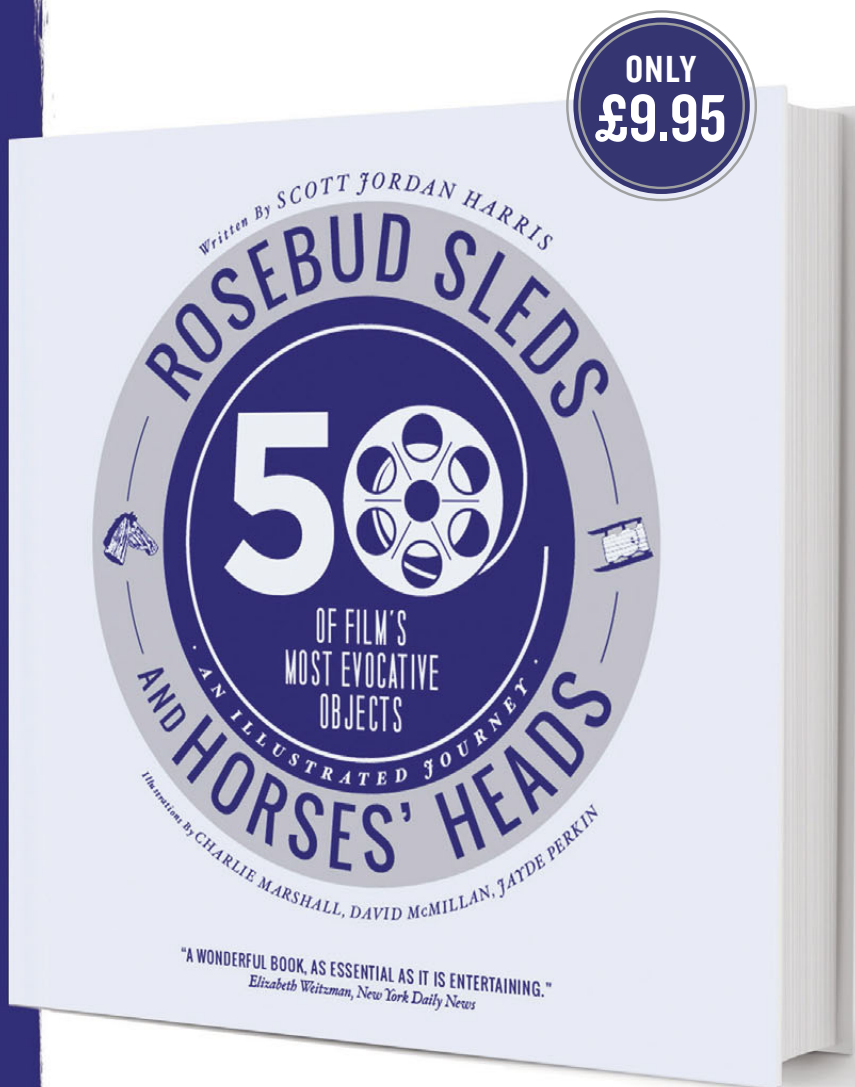
THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

“WEDS THE SOPHISTICATED
VISUAL
DREAMINESS
OF SOME GREAT
CHILDREN'S BOOKS
TO THE PROSE
OF AN UNUSUALLY
SMOOTH SCHOLAR”

WESLEY MORRIS, PULITZER PRIZE WINNER

SCREEN GEMS!

ONLY
£9.95



ROSEBUD SLEDS AND HORSES' HEADS 50 OF FILM'S MOST EVOCATIVE OBJECTS

A new book by Scott Jordan Harris

Dorothy's ruby slippers. Michael Myers's mask. Marilyn Monroe's billowy white dress. Indiana Jones's trusty hat. These objects are synonymous with the films they appear in, have become icons of popular culture, and, at long last, a book has come along that sorts and chronicles fifty of them.

Available to purchase now for £9.95
www.rosebudsledsandhorsesheads.com



WWW.INTELLECTBOOKS.COM

Produced in partnership with PARKCIRCUS.COM & ALLCITYMEDIA.COM

ALEJANDRO RAMIREZ MAGANA

The head of Mexico's global cinema chain Cinépolis talks arthouse film, tapping the Indian market and the pleasures of salsa on popcorn

By Nick Roddick

Alejandro Ramírez Magaña is sitting on the roof terrace of his family's first cinema – or, to be more precise, on the roof terrace of the Cinépolis multiplex, which now stands on the site of the old Cinema Morelia. Morelia, capital of the Mexican state of Michoacán, is also the headquarters of the global Cinépolis empire, of which Ramírez is the CEO and which, at last count (in August 2013), consisted of 3,204 screens in 357 cinemas located in 11 countries spread over three continents. That makes it the fourth-largest cinema circuit in the world – not bad for a family business.

Exhibition, the last link in the delivery chain by which movies reach audiences in large-screen format, is the ugly sister of the film business, its executives more likely to be passionate about popcorn than fanatical about film. And yet, as anyone who has crammed into one of the UK's hastily converted 1980s multi-screens will know, cinemas have a profound effect on how much we enjoy films on a big screen.

Ramírez, the third generation of his family to go into the cinema business, learned this early on. "The trend when people started doing multiplexes was to smaller and smaller screens. In the end, you were watching the film on a screen that was almost the size of your home TV... and you were paying so much more. So we said, 'No, we want to think about the customer experience and not sacrifice anything in terms of the quality of projection and sound. It has to be impeccable: large screens, stadium seating, enough leg-room, comfortable seats with high backs so you have a headrest.'"

It took Cinépolis a number of years to get there, and the sailing wasn't always plain. Going from a single screen in Morelia, which opened in 1956, into a worldwide business initially involved fighting the state-owned cinema monopoly COTSA (Compañía Operadora de Teatros). "Then in '94," Ramírez says, "the government privatised COTSA and with that came the liberalisation of the distribution system. That's when we changed the brand to Cinépolis and started opening multiplexes."

For a while, this brave new free-market world was just as difficult. "When the industry was deregulated, we faced very strong competition from the major exhibition circuits; from United Artists and General Cinema from the US and Hoyts from Australia. We were competing against much bigger exhibitors with much bigger pockets. But we were able to survive because we knew the market and we also invested aggressively to try and use that window of opportunity to build larger multiplexes with better technology. We introduced a lot of technological innovations in Mexico. That was done by us, not the American exhibitors."

Cinépolis has also made a point of promoting arthouse cinema. It sponsors the Morelia International Film Festival (Ramírez is chairman



Crossing continents: Alejandro Ramírez Magaña

of the board; the festival gets to keep 100 per cent of the box office, with Cinépolis surviving on concession sales) and other cultural events, like a French film week. It has also introduced a dedicated 'sala de arte' screen in many of its multiplexes. "The festival started as a philanthropic thing," Ramírez admits. "We always thought of it as a not-for-profit [venture]. But we wanted to support something whose mission was to back young Mexican filmmakers because we think it's important, not only for culture and the arts but also for the health of the industry as a whole."

The expansion into the rest of Latin America – Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama, Honduras, Colombia, Peru and Brazil – followed the Cinépolis formula of striving to offer quality while at the same time keeping a close eye on the local market. And, yes, this had as much to do with popcorn as with programming. "Even though we're culturally similar, there are subtle differences between audiences, especially in the type of food they like to eat in the cinema," says Ramírez. "You know, we Mexicans love to put salsa on our popcorn; [elsewhere in Latin America] they don't. We love nachos; in Brazil, they don't like them so much. Also there are subtle differences in terms of programming. Mexico is a market that is driven mainly by family and action films. It's not necessarily the same in Brazil and Colombia."

In North America, where Cinépolis has recently opened 80 screens in California, Florida

and Virginia, the approach has been different again: the chain has not, as one might have expected, targeted Hispanic audiences but has instead focused on the niche 'VIP' sector, showing mainstream Hollywood movies ("because that's what they like") in a luxury screening environment – waiter service, a wider choice of food – at \$18.50 a pop (the average US ticket price is around \$11). Again, the company is ahead of the curve: in the past year, Europe has just begun to wake up to the concept of VIP cinemas.

And then there is India, where Cinépolis now operates multiplexes in 11 cities. Moving into that market was, admits Ramírez, a gamble that started, of all things, as a masters project at Stanford Business School, where Cinépolis's chief operating officer, Miguel Mier, had gone to study. "Miguel introduced me to a couple of his classmates with whom he had been discussing the potential of the Indian marketplace. They sat me down and within half an hour they sold me the idea that it was a huge market with a huge fan base, a huge movie production industry but very bad cinemas. They told me it was a no-brainer for a company like Cinépolis!"

"It was, of course, much harder in reality than on paper because of the complexities of the Indian marketplace: each state is different and the entertainment taxes are huge. But there was such a scarcity of quality multiplexes, and there was an emerging middle class in the larger and even the smaller cities who wanted air conditioning, nice seating, digital projection, digital sound, 3D and so on – and were prepared to pay for it."

Once again, it was a question of both responding to, and leading, audiences – the Cinépolis mantra. Concludes Ramírez: "It takes time but at the end of the day, you develop new audiences and it becomes profitable."

Odeon, take note. 

'We wanted to support young Mexican filmmakers. It's important not only for culture but for the health of the industry'

IDFA

FORAYS WITH CAMERA



Salt of the earth: Farida Pacha's meditative, immersive portrait of labour in Gujarat, *My Name Is Salt*, was IDFA's First Appearance award winner

After a remarkable year for documentaries, IDFA 2013 seemed a little on the quiet side, but there were still a few gems to be found

By Nick Bradshaw

The world's biggest festival of its kind – this year recording some 220,000 visits, with 2,600 industry delegates attending – the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam has its detractors, who brand it a 'supermarket' and bemoan the prevalence of routine social-issue stories. But as I emerged from *Manhunt: the Search for Bin Laden* – admiring IDFA's catholicism even as I felt the nagging airlessness of another polished history lesson from the John Battsek pump house – I wondered: why shouldn't purists' favourites jostle with more populist factual fare? Because time is scarce and we want to cut to the good stuff, would be the hard-minded answer. At any rate, you can open the floodgates too far, I decided a day later as I fled an audience-award favourite whose opening ten minutes declared a dead eye, deaf ear and narrative club-foot.

Still, the festival encompasses much mastery. Recent years' winners have included the

variously wonderful *First Cousin Once Removed*, *Planet of Snail*, *Position Among the Stars*, *Last Train Home* and *Burma VJ*, while Rithy Panh succeeded Victor Kossakovsky, Steve James and Pirjo Honkasalo as this year's retrospective subject, with Heddy Honigmann already lined up for 2014. All the same, after a remarkable year for documentaries, IDFA 2013 struck this second-time visitor as on the quiet side, offering few grounds for wide-eyed word-spreading à la Ancient Mariner. (The festival was also mourning the late Peter Wintonick, roving documentary ambassador and a genial face of this festival and many others.)

One film all too sadly timed – but deserving attention for reasons beyond that – was Khalo Matabane's *A Letter to Nelson Mandela*, a plaintive essay on (to paraphrase Philip Gourevitch) this Moses's failure to lead South Africans to anything like the promised land. Its preponderance of globe-trotting starry talking heads – everyone from Colin Powell and Peter Hain to the Palestinian director Elia Suleiman and the Dalai Lama, though no Bono – threatened to bear out what Matabane told us he'd found in making the film: "Those who love [Mandela] take it for granted that we all love him; those that don't think it's enough to say he sold out."

But there was an engagingly anti-polemical sense of intellectual enquiry – of dilemmas of reconciliation and justice being turned over in the light; the grace of Ariel Dorfman and Nuruddin Farah justified a lot of the talk, and when the film did show rather than tell, it did so with glowingly poised imagery.

Vladimir Putin, meanwhile, triumphed in the most-referenced-leader stakes, thanks to

IDFA has its detractors, who bemoan the prevalence of routine social-issue stories, but it still encompasses much mastery



Song from the Forest

both Alexander Gentelev's *Putin's Games*, a hit-and-miss investigation of the politics of the Sochi Winter Olympics, and the anonymously directed *Pussy Versus Putin*, a grassroots improvement on last year's *Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer*, featuring ghastly graphics and hapless subtitles ("Massage on Twitter", if you will) but wicked flashes of visual eloquence.

IDFA's programme threw up a number of other doublings: American anti-gay violence in the short *Facing Fear* and Michele Josue's *Matt Shepard Is a Friend of Mine*, Spanish street protests in Vicente Pérez Herrero's morose, possibly parodic *Crustaceans* and Kossakovsky's delightful *Demonstration*, shot with 32 Barcelona film students and quite marvellously animating their pooled footage to Léon Minkus's ballet music *Don Quixote*, until less festive reality intrudes. There was more doubling in Niels van Koevorden and Sabine Lubbe Bakker's droll tragicomedy *Ne me quitte pas*, which tracked the odd-couple comradeship of two Belgian farmers – hangdog Fleming Bob and Walloon cowboy Marcel – who've swapped women for drink and an insouciant death-drive; with its deadpan ambivalence and unerring unpredictability, it would have been a shoo-in for the audience award if I'd been the audience. But there was strange synchronicity indeed between the feature-length award winner, Michael Obert's *Song from the Forest*, and Linda Västrik's *Forest of the Dancing Spirits* (given the Peter Wintonick Special Jury Award for First Appearance), both of which broached the world of the Central African Republic's Aka pygmies. Obert asked us to consider civilisation through the eyes, ears and words of music documentarist (and Jim Jarmusch confidant) Louis Sarno, a 25-year adopted citizen of the forest, and those of the teenage son he takes back to Manhattan. Västrik dived directly into the erotic rituals and fertility politics of the Aka, who proved happy to share.

This sense of cameras delving into the world's further reaches was complemented by several that found different ways to slice it, from Vitaly Mansky's mole-like odyssey along the Euro-Siberian gas-line *Pipeline* to Claire Simon's cross-section of the Gare du Nord *Human Geography*, or Boris Gerrets's metaphorically rich journey through the night in the society of blind young Sierra Leoneans, *Shado'man*.

Final word, though, for the First Appearance award winner, Farida Pacha's *My Name is Salt*. The stark, luminous rituals of salt mining have been manna to filmmakers from Mikhail Kalatozov's 1930 *Salt for Svanetia* to Margot Benacerraf's *Araya* (1958); and this stunningly poised portrait of a season's salt-panning in the Little Rann of Kutch, a desert in Gujarat, keeps them fine company. Crisply sculpted out of found elements – epic flat landscapes, iridescent light, formations of salt rakers and mounds, abandoned vehicles, very occasional dialogue and diegetic music – it's a meditative, immersive picture of labour as an act of faith, made with striking flair and beauty. ☺



See Robert Greene's Unfiction column round up of the best cinematic nonfiction of 2013, and homages to Peter Wintonick, at bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

CPH:DOX STAYING TRUE TO ITS ROOTS

Despite an expanded focus on activism, the festival still found space for the kind of esoteric work with which it made its name

By Isabel Stevens

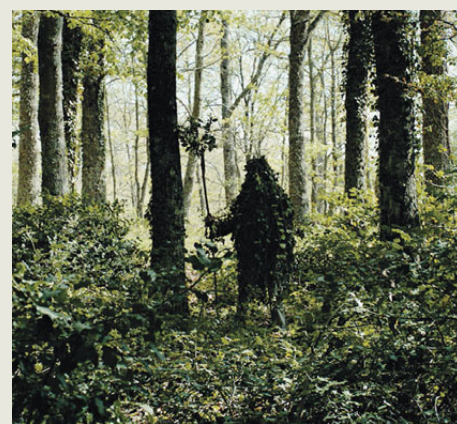
Kicking off a couple of weeks before IDFA, CPH:DOX sets itself apart as the world's largest documentary showcase with an experimental leaning and a commitment to interrogating the medium across its many strands. Shape-shifting non-fiction is a mainstay of the competition – winners of past editions include Ben Rivers's *Two Years at Sea* and Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* – while a section titled New Vision is reserved specifically for artists' film. So the programme this year raised a few eyebrows: a new section and award for investigative journalistic fare as well as a double focus through two guest-curated sidebars (one by culture jamming duo The Yes Men, the other by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei) on activism and resistance: neither a style of documentary nor a subject normally synonymous with hybrid cinema or formal innovation.

Ai Weiwei loomed large over the programme (despite being prevented from attending by

Shape-shifting non-fiction is a mainstay of the competition – past winners include Ben Rivers and Joshua Oppenheimer

the Chinese authorities). If at times his film selection (from Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* to Antonioni's travelogue of China's Cultural Revolution, *Chung Kuo, Cina*) felt like a loose collection of interests rather than a focused curatorial exploration, Ai's own competition film *Stay Home!* and Andreas Johnsen's profile of the artist during his house arrest in 2011, *Ai Weiwei The Fake Case* provided more insight into his belief in the firebrand role of an artist. *Stay Home!* was Ai's own protest film following a woman, Liu Ximei, as she petitions Chinese authorities for healthcare for herself and others after being infected with HIV at a hospital when she was young. The film was at times a little too meandering and oblique, but came alive witnessing Ximei audaciously bargaining with and occasionally outright harassing local party members.

In the investigative strand, the Danish journalist jury's spotlight fell on the thriller-esque exposé *Dirty Wars*, but there were more probing, singular inquiries present: Marc Bauder's *Master of the Universe*, a candid and surprisingly cinematic 90-minute conversation with an ex-banker in a derelict Frankfurt bank; but most of all, Rachel Boynton's *Big Men*. Seven years in the making, Boynton's study of the fledgling oil industry in Ghana is a complex examination of greed that spends time observing and interviewing everyone in the economic chain, from ordinary Ghanaians,



Michael Frammartino's *Alberi*

to the country's politicians and start-up oil men, to Nigeria's Delta rebels and American hedge fund CEOs. Intriguingly, no villains are hanged, everyone has dollar signs in their eyes and there are no simple conclusions about the future and whether the profits will ever seep down to the Ghanaian people.

The films in the main competition and New Vision strand were proof the festival had certainly not abandoned the kind of esoteric, formal adventures that made its name in the past. Narimane Mari's *Bloody Beans* which won the main prize was a daring, dislocating historical restaging, centring on a group of children play-acting the Algerian War of Independence in the present day. The film's dreamlike nocturnal sequences, where the gang of nomadic, juvenile insurgents kidnap a French soldier, were some of the strangest, most arresting moments of the festival. But it was another re-enactment, Michelangelo Frammartino's immersive installation *Alberi*, that was undoubtedly the highlight. An offshoot of the director's 2010 quasi-documentary about an elderly goat herder, *Le quattro volte*, and set in and around the same remote Italian village, it observes local male inhabitants performing a now-forgotten ritual based around the myth of Romito, a tree-like man who rejected the idea of migration and rooted himself in the land.

It begins at night, with a disorientating soundtrack of creaking branches, restless leaves and bird calls all conjuring a wilderness out of the pitch-black dome-screen. As dawn breaks, Frammartino's camera begins a giddy journey, sweeping along branches, swirling around to take in the canopy and the changing palette of the skies above. Then, out of this primordial landscape, an army of tree creatures appears: their fingertips and the whites of their eyes the only features distinguishing them from their surroundings. As this verdant parade marches back through fields and into the village, Frammartino's long shots revel in the bizarre spectacle. The wordless, surreal 28-minute film culminates with the villagers surrounding the camera in a boisterous celebration, plunging it into darkness and sending it back to the forest to begin the whole experience again – a fade-to-black technique employed often in *Le quattro volte* to emphasise the cyclical nature of life, but made all the more potent here in an actual loop. ☺



INSIDE THE WHEEL

The folk-singing protagonist at the heart of the Greenwich Village scene in the early 1960s in 'Inside Llewyn Davis' is trapped in a cycle of endless misfortune, trying to make a success of things against the odds. But then, as the Coen brothers suggest, isn't that a bit like life?

By Nick James

It's an October morning, the second slot in the Coen brothers' 2013 London Film Festival junket schedule. I'm meeting them for the first time, which, considering how many times we've run interviews with them under my editorship, feels oddly belated. It feels odder still when I enter the large, low-lit hotel room because right away, I feel comfortable. Of course, the Coens are in my age group – we're all late entries of the baby-boom generation – but they have a reputation for being taciturn, so I ought to be anxious. Look at these guys on the cover of the magazine – they're intimidating, right? If you make as many successful black comedies about the human condition as they have, you constantly face a barrage of questions ranging from dumb to obvious, so for them, auto-pilot can be a tempting prospect. My questions may be no better than anyone else's, but I came to terms with that before I came in. So I open with one I already know the answer to.

"I understand that *Inside Llewyn Davis* was derived from a single idea: what if Dave Van Ronk got beaten up outside Gerde's Folk City? Was it the milieu of the 1960s Greenwich Village folk scene or that particular plot motivator that kept bringing you back to the idea?"

"I guess it was both," says Ethan. "The idea seemed funny or intriguing because it seemed a little preposterous. Who would beat up a folk singer and why? But we did have an interest in the music and the scene. It seemed like a fun place to set a movie, a very well-defined scene, a very specific time and place. That always helps get you going in terms of a story."

Ethan's advice is good, so let's take a moment to go into the background of the film. It's a slice of the life of Llewyn Davis, a folk singer on the aforementioned scene. He's the son of a retired Welsh merchant seaman and he's been to sea himself; as a musician he used to be half of a double act, but his partner committed suicide; he



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JULIAN ANDERSON

O BROTHER!
Oscar Isaac (left, with Ulysses the cat) stars as a folk singer trying to hang tough in the face of despair in Ethan (top) and Joel Coen's *Inside Llewyn Davis*



COLD COMFORT
(Clockwise from above)
Oscar Isaac channelling
Dylan from the *Freewheelin'*
album cover image, which
the Coens admit provides
the keynote for *Inside Llewyn*
Davis; Oscar hits the road;
Carey Mulligan as folksinger
Jean; and a performer at the
Gaslight Café in the film

has no fixed abode but relies on a network of spare beds and couches – sometimes the beds of his friends' girlfriends. What we see immediately the film starts is Llewyn performing beautifully the traditional song 'Hang Me, Oh Hang Me' – and, as Llewyn, Oscar Isaac (who is actually of mixed Cuban and Guatemalan parentage) really does sing and play guitar all the way through. The song is the epitome of world-weariness. He sings: "It's not the hanging, it's the laying in the grave so long... I've been all around this world."

So there's Llewyn Davis, a typical Coens protagonist, hanging tough in the face of despair in what will turn out to be a bitterly bleak film enlivened chiefly by wit in the face of adversity and people constantly telling him he's an asshole, which may well be true. He's good-looking, his song performance sounds heartfelt, but he looks doleful and detached, like the cool professional waiting for a good audience to warm him up. But then this whole folk milieu is full of shivery young people who look like they need an extra sweater. The simplest way of understanding where this idea of the Village comes from is to stare at the cover image of Bob Dylan's *Freewheelin'* album. There you see Dylan cuddling up to his then girlfriend Suze Rotolo as they walk through the snow down Jones Street. The picture was taken by Columbia Records staffer Don Hunstein, as Rotolo recalls in her *A Freewheelin' Time: A Memoir of Greenwich Village in the Sixties*. "Bob put on his suede jacket," she says. "It was an image choice because

that jacket was not remotely suited for the weather." This is interesting in terms of authenticity because Ethan admits, when I suggest it, that this one image provides the keynote for the Coens' film: "That's how the scene looks and feels, not just in our minds but in everyone's mind. It's not just Greenwich Village in 1961. It's got to be wintry, slushy grey, overcast Greenwich Village."

The Coens mention several other sources for the film (they both read a Village oral history entitled *Hoot!: A 25-Year History of the Greenwich Village Music Scene*; New Lost City Ramblers member John Cohen is an old friend) but the most central is Dave Van Ronk's *The Mayor of MacDougal Street: A Memoir*, co-written with Elijah Wald. Van Ronk was established on the scene long before its fashionable heyday. He had sailed as a merchant seaman, and migrated from New Orleans jazz to folk in the mid-50s, taking with him several old jazz/blues classics, which he adapted for folk guitar. Van Ronk saw the whole scene change – especially in the wake of Dylan's success after Peter, Paul and Mary made a hit out of 'Blowin' in the Wind' – and he apparently rode the transition without much bitterness, even when a flood of new people came in who were prepared to play for free, thus depriving pros like Van Ronk of established gigs (shades of what's happened to film critics lately). He was a friend of Dylan, there's even an album called *Inside Dave Van Ronk* and 'Hang Me, Oh Hang Me' is one of his numbers. But, of course, Llewyn Davis is not Van Ronk – for one thing



Oscar Isaac's singing is much more gently seductive and lilting than the raw and raucous Van Ronk style – and, as with any Coens subject, the love and admiration they feel for this milieu is tempered with a sense of humour that gets blacker and more deadpan, it seems, with each new film.

They coolly prick, for instance, the solemnity that makes so many 60s vintage folk performances now hard to take. And yet they are very concerned, also, that we experience complete song performances. “We wanted to make a movie about a musician specifically,” says Ethan, “and there is something about a musician’s character that only gets revealed when they do that. You don’t want him to just strum a couple of chords and indicate a song and move on, you want to hear the song. And the songs themselves have their own emotional – and even thematic – content that you only get if you hear the song all the way through. They’re important to the movie in the way that score is. [We also wanted to do it because] people don’t usually do it.”

So it follows that from the ‘Hang Me’ get-go we know that the Coens are hanging Llewyn out to dry. I ask if the underlying theme of grief for Llewyn’s former singing partner come from any of the memoirs of the time? “No,” says Ethan. “That’s a special thing just for our character. It’s another thing to beset him with; that people use that needles him. We were also intrigued with the idea of there being a ghost that haunts the movie. And in some

‘We started thinking we may have written something that is not castable. When you’re writing, you can’t anchor yourself to those concerns, because it’s very inhibiting.’

weird way, it’s a travelling thing, another thing to make him an exile of sorts. He’s no longer in that partnership and he doesn’t quite know where he’s going.”

Halfway through my half-hour interview slot, I don’t quite know where it’s going either. Though the Coens have been courteous and informative, I want to get them off their practised answers. Happily the talk becomes more amusing when I raise subjects that caused them difficulties. First, about casting Isaac, Ethan says, “In the process of writing we... were not thinking about what a casting trap we were setting for ourselves. Having finished it we thought, ‘Oh God’... The task is that the character is in every scene of the movie, so he’s got to be an actor, but it was also important to us that the songs be played in their entirety, and that seemed to dictate that the person would be a musician... We auditioned a few. It’s always interesting to see them play, but then you would do a scene and you go, ‘My God, this person is not an actor.’ It was like a discovery: ‘Oh my God, we actually need an actor.’”

Joel chips in: “We started thinking we may have written something that is not castable. When you’re writing, you can’t anchor yourself to those concerns, because it’s very inhibiting. You have to feel like you can write whatever you want. You know, the airplane crashes into the mountain, without thinking about how you’re going to make the airplane crash into the mountain. This may, in a way, have been the ultimate example of being blithe about that.”

It seems like a good moment to mention the cat. One of the many problems sent to try Llewyn is that he lets a ginger cat belonging to one of his wealthier benefactors get out of an Upper West Side apartment, where he’s just cadged a bed for the night. So he takes the cat around with him but – plot spoiler alert – eventually the cat escapes from the cold-water apartment where fellow singers Jim (Justin Timberlake) and Jean (Carey Mulligan) live. Jean happens to be pregnant by Llewyn and wants money for an abortion. Jim, of course, doesn’t know. We’ll get back to Carey later, albeit in a small way.

I ask about the cat. Ethan says: “That’s another example of not thinking about how nightmarish it’s going to be in production. Cats are just difficult and we’d actually done that before in *The Ladykillers*. On the set it’s just infuriating and frustrating and time-consuming.” The cat is, of course, very cute, and works well to soften Llewyn’s harsher edges and show that he wants to be a caring sort of person, even though he’s mostly a major failure at that.

Moving on, I mention a character in *The Mayor of MacDougal Street* who seemed to me like a comic gift – a hardass kid called A. K. who gets Van Ronk in trouble with the police on a road trip – but who isn’t in the film. “We remember that,” says Joel, “but that somehow got changed on the road trip to this kind of irascible, nightmare character in the back seat that became John Goodman. Maybe we subconsciously knew we didn’t want to take on both animals and children.”

One trademark of the Coens is the way they structure their films around characters returning to places they’ve been before, almost like returning to the scene of the crime. *Inside Llewyn Davis* is no different – indeed it begins and ends with the same scene. When I suggest that this film is particularly cyclical, Ethan agrees, describing Llewyn as being on “a hamster wheel” 



FOLK HEROES

The Coens (above, and with Justin Timberlake and Oscar Isaac on set) were concerned that the audience should experience complete song performances containing their own emotional and thematic content



of sorts". But then the interview takes a different turn. For some reason, I was struck by a moment in the film where Llewyn is driving back through a blizzard to New York from Chicago and he sees the lights of Akron, where he has reason to look up a former girlfriend. It seemed like a complex shot to work out. This turns out to be the question that knocks Joel and Ethan out. "That scene was a motherf***er," says Joel, and he proceeds with a complex technical description that regrettably would be more suited to *American Cinematographer* than to this organ. Ethan realises this and says, "It's all unbelievably boring and at the end of the day you can't even describe it because who cares? It doesn't even look like martians are coming shooting laser beams. It's all these effects to get the most mundane shot imaginable."

And yet the question works. Because no one had asked them it before, the brothers seem suddenly happier. Says Joel, "It's just interesting that you picked up on that because it was something that was supposed to look fairly straightforward but it was incredibly complicated."

The mood is so different that I feel emboldened to tease them a bit, taking a leaf out of their own book by returning to Llewyn's Job-like list of travails.

I say, "I feel like at some point when you were writing the screenplay you just took against Llewyn and kept loading more and more onto him."

"We heaped it on, didn't we," Ethan agrees.

"We do tend to do that," adds Joel.

"And yet you do want people to be feeling what he's feeling, right?" I say.

Joel says, "It's our experience that when you dump on characters they become sympathetic."

Now I know this is screenplay writing 101, but more so even than *A Serious Man*, *Inside Llewyn Davis* wants its audience to feel and think along with its unsympathetic lead. I want them to spell that out, so I ask: "Even if you've got a Greek chorus of people telling you he's an asshole?"

Joel says, "You make the character an asshole, then you have people constantly screaming at him that he's an asshole, then the audience starts to feel sorry for him, even though they know he is an asshole."

"And also there is something funny about Carey [Mulligan] screaming at him," says Ethan.

"His sheepishness in the face of it is kinda endearing," says Joel. "That was great fun, actually, Carey screaming at Oscar."

"She really enjoyed it," says Ethan.

That's a great example of the extremes the Coens are now prepared to go to make a bereft, sour folk singer who's about to miss the boat of the folk boom somehow lovable. It helps that Isaac so perfectly captures the appeal of the musical hustler he's inhabiting. But what does it say about the brothers that they want this so badly? Thinking about how long the pair have been a staple interest of this magazine and at the same time having noticed two tendencies among some of my peers – a general slowness to cheer them these days and, among a few, a trenchant antipathy – I ask them if they get concerned that people take them for granted.

"All of that is pretty peripheral," says Ethan. "It's not what you really think about during the course of the day – you're doing your thing, making your movie and that hasn't changed. You step back and go, 'Oh wow, we're a known entity now.' [But] you appreciate that or are dismayed by it very infrequently."

Joel says, "You see it as a function of getting older and sticking around long enough to have some kind of profile, and it's mostly attributable to the fact that you've managed to hang around that long. The thing that's shocking to us is how long we've been hanging around. You kind of go, 'Jesus, really? That was 30 years ago?' That's shocking."

But, I wonder, do they ever feel that they'd like to do something else for a while.

"Oh we go through that, for sure," says Joel.

"Yeah," says Ethan, "you want to go over the wall. Sometimes you hear about people who've made it out. They're not in showbiz any more. And you go, 'Wow, they made it out.'"

"Send me a postcard," says Joel. "Getting older is interesting and what it does in every aspect of your life and also your professional life. You get some kind of reputation or profile in the business, which is an alien thing, and it's easy to remember when that wasn't the case at all and you're still, in a weird sort of a way, part of that mindset."

"The funny thing is," continues Ethan, "talking about the hamster wheel of our character trying get somewhere, trying to be successful – if you are successful, like we are, you're still on the hamster wheel. You know, when does the success end, man? How do you get out of this?"

"There's only one way out," says Joel. "Like in the mafia."



Inside Llewyn Davis is released in the UK on 24 January and is reviewed on page 81

'You make the character an asshole, then you have people screaming at him that he's an asshole, then the audience starts to feel sorry for him'

FINE TUNING

T Bone Burnett, the Coens' music producer, recalls the challenges of finding songs for 'Inside Llewyn Davis' to breathe life into a fictional folk legend

By Frances Morgan

When Ethan Coen called T Bone Burnett in 1998 to ask him to work on a film about “the history of American music”, it was an offer the producer and songwriter couldn’t refuse. That film, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), saw the Coens and Burnett reanimate North American roots music with a soundtrack of blues, bluegrass and gospel songs performed by modern country stars including Alison Krauss and Gillian Welch and more obscure veterans such as Ralph Stanley. *O Brother* established the relationship between the brothers and Burnett, which began when he selected tunes for *The Big Lebowski* (1998). The synergy with which they operate is apparent throughout *Inside Llewyn Davis*. The Greenwich Village setting and emotional tenor of the Coens’ new film is wintry and downbeat, muted in colour, yet its diegetic musical sequences glow with the energy of an intimate live show. This seemingly effortless effect, it turns out, was anything but easy.

“Joel said, ‘We want to work with full live performances of songs by the actors, and we want to do it without pre-records,’” recalls Burnett. “And I thought... ‘Oh.’ [Laughs] Because I’d never done that. When you’re filming a song, there are so many variables. Tempos can change, tone can change, feeling can change and you can lose continuity; it’s difficult to cut from take to take. But I believed if the Coens said they could do that, then they knew how to film it, so I said, ‘Okay, let’s do it.’ If they were less experienced filmmakers, or not as lucky filmmakers, I would have advised against it because it’s too risky.”

“There were two or three pieces in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* that we filmed live, but they were pieces that we were only using a verse of, and then we would cut away,” he continues. “But [*Inside Llewyn Davis*] was just getting right in on the live performances.”

Those performances, by Oscar Isaac, Justin Timberlake, Carey Mulligan and Stark Sands among others, are accomplished musical and technical set pieces. But they are also employed as plot points and emotional markers, as in Robert Altman’s *Nashville* (1975) – and indeed the current ABC TV series of the same name, which Burnett worked on as executive music producer for its first season. The choice of songs was key. The Coens had specified ‘Hang Me, Oh Hang Me’ and ‘Fare Thee Well’ in the script, Burnett tells



Shades of genius: T Bone Burnett

me, but after that, “we all worked together”. Isaac, he says, brought non-musical reference points too, including Charles Bukowski and Buster Keaton. The soundtrack that evolved is chronologically spot-on but with a postmodern self-awareness, putting young folk artists such as Mumford & Sons’ Marcus Mumford and bluegrass group Punch Brothers alongside Dave Van Ronk and a previously unreleased Bob Dylan take. Two traditional numbers, ‘The Roving Gambler’ and ‘The Death Of Queen Jane’, stand out: these would be recorded by Simon & Garfunkel and Joan Baez shortly after *Inside Llewyn Davis* is set, and you wonder whether they’re a playful hint that the fictional Davis might have influenced more well-known artists.

Burnett nods. “When you’re working on a film like this, on fiction, you can work backward and forward at the same time, so you can create precedents for things that have no precedent. That’s a lot of fun. With ‘Queen Jane’, for instance, we recorded a folk-rock version of it that was done in 1965 – I wanted to feel where Llewyn was going, you know? When he says ‘au revoir’ at the end [of the film], there’s a gleam in his eye, something that says: something good’s going to happen.”

Despite imagining this future rock career for Davis, Burnett cleaves to the idea that he’s still a folk singer, making “music that grows right up out of the ground”. But Davis, and singers such as Dave Van Ronk and Peter LaFarge as well as Dylan, were making folk music for a mass-media age, based in cities

rather than *O Brother*’s rural Mississippi. Their understanding of traditional music was informed by collections such as those made by Harry Smith, Alan Lomax – whose film *Ballads, Blues and Bluegrass* was made in 1961 – and Samuel Charters; less so with oral transmission. Thus their interpretations of folk songs are often individualistic, scanning the age-old lines for answers to inner conflicts.

Folk song’s shift away from its function within communities to its role as a carrier of internalised individual narratives is perhaps what sets *Llewyn Davis*’s telling of American musical history most significantly apart from *O Brother*’s. “It was a very different time,” says Burnett of the latter film. “It was part of that shift into a new century and not losing parts of us that are important... this oral history that’s thousands of years old. It’s nothing we were figuring out, but you can see it in retrospect.”

Yet since then, *O Brother*’s soundtrack has become a Harry Smith anthology for post-millennial musicians – Mumford among them – for whom it was a first contact with traditional music: “a portal to that world,” as Burnett puts it. In reimagining those archives, he and the Coens became archivists themselves. It’s a role Burnett seems happy with: on *The Big Lebowski*’s credits he is listed as ‘music archivist’ rather than ‘supervisor’. This is something of a personal quirk (“I hate the notion of music being supervised,” he explains), but it’s a telling one, in keeping with the way the directors dig down through layers of music, unearthing unexpected seams that run through their films.

“That’s right, they’re very much archaeologists – they’re brilliant archaeologists,” Burnett agrees. “They have a deep understanding of what they’re digging up, too.” ☺

‘Joel said: “We want full live performances by the actors, and we want to do it without pre-records.” And I thought... “Oh”

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Steve McQueen's '12 Years a Slave' observes with raw, unflinching brutality the true story of a free black man who is forced into slavery in America's Deep South – a visceral and distressing portrait of racial abuse that underscores the director's belief that 'if you don't see it visually, mentally, psychologically, physically, then there's no picture'

By Jonathan Romney

In his intensely detailed 1853 memoir *12 Years A Slave*, Solomon Northup – a free black man from the American North, abducted and forced into slavery in Louisiana – recalls an auction at which he was sold. He comments on the physical inspection to which slaves were subjected by potential buyers: “Scars upon a slave’s back were considered evidence of a rebellious or unruly spirit, and hurt his sale.” Reading the book after watching Steve McQueen’s powerful and distressing screen adaptation, this sentence jumps out at you, just as the film’s images of scarred bodies jump out from the screen.

One thing that establishes the “rebellious or unruly spirit” of McQueen’s film is that it pulls no punches in depicting the extremity of slavery’s abuses, including the physical ones. Whenever I’ve seen cinematic depictions of whipping as institutionalised punishment – whether in the context of slavery or in, say, historical naval dramas – it’s usually been in the form of an image of a slashed shirt, and a few discreet lines of red. McQueen refuses such visual bowdlerisation. His film makes it clear that the lash was used in the slavery system of the American South not as an exception, but routinely (Northup’s book minutely describes the cold arithmetic by which a certain number of lashes would be doled out for perceived transgressions). In *12 Years a Slave*, we see not only the scars on slaves’ bodies, but also horrific networks of fresh welts, bodies cut open like so much meat.

This is only one of the shocking sights in McQueen’s film, and one of its bravest floutings of cinematic decorum. But the British filmmaker and artist is someone for

whom the body is a given constant: the travails of human corporeality have been central to his two previous features, *Hunger* (2008), about IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands, and *Shame* (2011), about a man’s experience of sexual addiction. McQueen has also used his own body, sometimes confrontationally naked, in gallery film works such as *Bear* (1993).

12 Years a Slave has been met with unstinting acclaim since its Telluride premiere in October. The *New Yorker*’s David Denby called it “easily the greatest feature film ever made about American slavery”; as I write this, the New York Film Critics Circle has just named McQueen best director, and the film is expected to be a major presence in the coming awards season. There has also been dissent: critic Armond White has attacked *12 Years* as “the most unpleasant American film since... *The Exorcist*” and decried McQueen’s “interest in sado-masochistic display”. Yet what seems inarguable about the graphic brutality of McQueen’s film is that it stems from his desire to lift the veil of euphemism from the topic of slavery, and more specifically to make the dramatic account of Northup’s ordeal both vivid and truthful. McQueen and screenwriter John Ridley are remarkably faithful to Northup’s book – factually, structurally and in the use of highly formal language with a distinct ring of Herman Melville (80 per cent of the film’s dialogue, McQueen says, is taken straight from the book).

The film opens with Northup (Chiwetel Ejiofor), standing in a row of slaves, being instructed on the procedures of cane cutting; one of many moments

INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
Michael Fassbender as the violent, drunken Edwin Epps and Chiwetel Ejiofor as Solomon Northup in Steve McQueen’s *12 Years a Slave*





'My mother and father used to beat me with a belt, and if I talk to my mother about it now, she says it was because she was beaten with a belt. Those things get taken from slavery'

 emphasising that slavery was a highly organised commercial system, and that under its sway human beings were subjected to a formalised industrial process, in much the same way as the corncocks and cotton they were made to handle.

After its prelude, the film backtracks to Solomon's days as a free man in the North, living with his wife and children in Saratoga Springs, New York in 1841. An accomplished violinist, Solomon is approached by two strangers who offer him money to ply his trade at a circus. The men entertain the trusting Solomon to a cordial dinner, and we see him toast their generosity – before an abrupt cut to Solomon in irons in a cell. He has been abducted to be sold in the South as a slave – a fate not uncommon for free black men and women in this period. Chained and brutally beaten – within sight of Washington's Capitol, as shown by a bitterly ironic panoramic shot – Solomon learns that to insist he is a free man will cost him further beatings. He is deprived of his very identity, placed on sale under the first name 'Platt' (in fact, the very surname 'Northup', to which he clings so tenaciously, was itself imposed by the family that once owned his ancestors).

In his book, Northup speaks of inhabiting "the remotest depths of slavery" and his journey is indeed a descent into hell – an inferno of arbitrary domination by owners both overtly vicious and ostensibly benign. The supposedly humane whites Solomon encounters largely prove unreliable, unpredictable or at best weak – in no way true allies, and certainly unable to understand the real conditions that govern the lives of slaves, or indeed their own role in the system of oppression. This is brought home when a Mrs Ford attempts to comfort Eliza (Adepero Oduye), a woman distraught at being separated from her children. "Some food and some rest, and your children will soon be forgotten," coos Mrs Ford – an attempt at consolation all the more horrifying for its bland absence of empathy.

The film features several monstrous oppressors drawn directly from the book – the cold-hearted trader Freeman (Paul Giamatti), the thuggish overseer Tibeats (Paul Dano), and the drunken, violent Edwin Epps (Michael Fassbender) whose *folie à deux* with his jealous wife (Sarah Paulson: the film's most terrifying performance, because so coldly decorous) is the source of Solomon's harshest ordeals. But perhaps the most troubling figure is the slave-owning preacher Ford (Benedict Cumberbatch), whose piety and supposed humaneness are extremely limited because as a product of the long-entrenched slavery system, he is unable to see beyond it; he cannot begin to understand what it means for his slaves, or for himself, to be human. (The exceptional figure is a compassionate Canadian carpenter, played by the film's executive producer Brad Pitt, who engages Epps in somewhat theatrical debate on the ethics of slavery; this is the film's one truly awkward scene, yet true to the corresponding episode in Northup's book.)

Writing in *New York* magazine, Frank Rich, while greatly admiring *12 Years*, questions whether it and other recent films about "America's unfinished racial business" – among others, he lists Lee Daniels's *The Butler* and Ryan Coogler's *Fruitvale Station* – can make any tangible difference to the views of wider American audiences, or simply address liberal viewers already conversant with their message. I'd argue that the 'good man' Ford is a problem-

atic figure who offers a troublesome mirror to modern white liberals, allowing us to ask how far we ourselves are trapped by the limits of our age's dominant ideological and racial worldviews. For black audiences, however, it's clear that McQueen sees the film as a part of a still necessary process of empowerment. In a conversation with actor-rapper Common (posted online by *Entertainment Weekly*), the director comments that for a black person, the fact of slavery's history is a given: "That's your start in the world... What I would like to do is to embrace that past – to make it yours, to own it, to take it, to master it."

I spoke to McQueen in late November in Amsterdam, where he lives, and where he argues that addressing slavery is as critical as talking about the Holocaust: "We're sitting in Amsterdam, which is a very odd city – where 70 per cent of Jewish people were taken away, only second to Poland. What I'm trying to say is that history has to be told."

For McQueen, slavery is a topic that still demands to be examined because, he argues, its legacy has continued to infect society today – not only in the form of racism and inequality but within black culture itself. "My mother and father used to beat me with a belt, and if I talk to my mother about it now, she says it was because *she* was beaten with a belt – can you imagine? Those things get taken from slavery, which are never broken – which I'm breaking now because I can never imagine beating my child. There are those physical things which are so ingrained, that need to be dealt with. People laugh about it, but that's what people used to have to go to school with. This film is of *then*, but it is a reflection of now in a way."

McQueen has been delighted by the intense discussions that the film has sparked since he began promoting it – like "a town hall debate", he says with approval. But he adds, "What surprised me was that a couple of times I heard people saying, 'I never knew slavery was that bad.' It's one of those events in history that a lot of people don't want to engage with because of the real horror of it all."

McQueen stresses that he isn't concerned to compare *12 Years* with other films about slavery. "My focus was just on making this film. I wasn't interested in looking at other people's. That particular time in history was something I'd never seen before on screen and I wanted to visualise it." In fact, he didn't originally plan to adapt Northup's book, but began with the idea of focusing on a character who starts off free, and who therefore has the same acute awareness of slavery's injustice as Northup.

"I needed an 'in' on the narrative, and I had this idea of a free man kidnapped and brought to the South. I loved the idea of almost a Brothers Grimm fairy tale, where you get brought into this other world. That's not to say that the North was airy-fairy at the time – as a black person, you weren't even a citizen in the North, because you couldn't vote, but you were free."

It was only after McQueen had started work with writer John Ridley that the director's wife suggested looking at first-hand accounts; she was the one who discovered Northup's book. "I read it and I couldn't believe it," says McQueen, "and I was annoyed with myself because I thought, 'My goodness, I should know this book.' Then I realised that no one I knew had heard of it."

Published the year after Harriet Beecher Stowe's hugely popular (and still much debated) slave narrative *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the memoir was written in three months following Northup's liberation, with the



THERE WILL BE BLOOD
(From top) Chiwetel Ejiofor
with, in turn, director
Steve McQueen; Benedict
Cumberbatch as the
preacher Ford; Michael
Fassbender as Edwin
Epps and Lupita Nyong'o
as Patsey; and (left) an
illustration from Solomon
Northup's autobiography
12 Years a Slave



collaboration of a journalist named David Wilson, who recorded Northup's oral account. The book was immensely successful and sparked a series of theatrical adaptations, in some of which Northup played himself. Yet it eventually subsided into obscurity, and was largely forgotten until being annotated and republished in 1968. *Shaft* director Gordon Parks adapted the book in 1984, as PBS *American Playhouse* TV film *Solomon Northup's Odyssey*, but that version made little impact (US critic Wesley Morris, in his enthusiastic review of McQueen's film, recalls being shown *Solomon Northup's Odyssey* at school and finding it "earnest and sanitised").

McQueen was aware that requiring actors, of whatever race, to reenact the book's episodes of oppression was potentially traumatic for all concerned – "but I only want to work with artists. So if you can go there, let's go there." To reenact historic racial violence is already a delicate undertaking. Look at the unease stirred up in discussions of Tarantino's *Django Unchained*, a film whose cartoonish ironic distance (and the overt project of making a meta-genre movie inspired by slavery-themed westerns) made the unthinkable permissible – cauterised the wound, as it were. But in McQueen's film, the wound is open, on full display and painful to behold. Certain scenes of *12 Years* go as far as is imaginable in confronting audiences with the reality of physical and emotional suffering. Central to the drama is the fact that slaves were themselves co-opted as 'drivers' to lash their peers, their own survival contingent on their willingness to carry out the required brutalities. In one episode, Epps, motivated partly by sexual jealousy – his own as well as his wife's – requires Solomon to lash fellow slave Patsey (Lupita Nyong'o). Solomon has no choice but to do so, and the situation culminates in Patsey begging Solomon to kill her.

McQueen: "How do you survive within that regime? What would *you* do? I imagine that people in the audience find themselves questioning themselves in that situation. I had to go there – either we're making a movie about slavery or we're not. If you don't portray that – if you don't see it visually, mentally, psychologically, physically – then there's no picture. You have to portray a certain reality for people to say, 'Never again'."

The scene of Patsey's lashing is all the more disturbing because it suggests a complicity between her and Northup – as if, by taking the violence out of Epps's hands and performing it himself, Solomon is engaging in an act of love and mercy, however warped. "For her," says McQueen, "that is a situation of love, an act of kindness – she says, 'There won't be no hell for you.' It's extreme, but she's asking him to take her love because, 'I don't have the strength to do it myself.'"

The film was shot in Louisiana, the locations including plantations that in their day saw the very abuses depicted. "It was like dancing with ghosts. The trees saw everything. The heat was the thing – you write the script, but it changes completely because when you're there, everything informs the storytelling. When you read the book, what you don't understand is the heat. The first day we were there, it was 108 degrees. When you see Chiwetel Ejiofor sweating, that's real sweat – so the environment brings another dimension through the performance."

Almost permanently on screen, Ejiofor's Solomon is the film's magnetic centre, not just as the subject of his ordeal but also, essentially, as the observer of the institu-



In McQueen's film, the wound of slavery is open, on full display and painful to behold. Certain scenes go as far as is imaginable in confronting audiences

tion of slavery – a mental recorder before he can become its recorder on paper. That's why, says McQueen, "I just focused on his eyes. We looked at Keaton and Rudolf Valentino, as far as facial expressions go – because Solomon tells most of the story through his eyes and his face." But Ejiofor also shows incredible prowess in lending his body to Solomon, above all in the extraordinary extended shot in which Solomon is hung from a tree with his feet touching the ground just enough to keep him alive – while his fellow slaves largely go about their business as usual in the background. It's a terrifyingly palpable illustration of slavery's normalisation of violence, and one of the more formal scenes in the film – although that's something McQueen prefers to downplay.

"I don't think it's necessarily formal, it's just time passing. I suppose if I hadn't been an artist, people wouldn't have that idea. But I see formality in so many things, in John Ford or whatever – that's not interesting for me. What's interesting is telling the story in a proper and correct way. How to hold the attention of the audience, but also to show the psychological effect of slavery? Through that shot held on Solomon, while behind him they're exiting the huts, knowing they can't touch him – that if they did, they'd be hung up next to him."

Released in the UK in January, McQueen's film will continue to elicit debate, and to spur a re-examination of the admittedly slender cycle of screen depictions of slavery, some of which have re-emerged in discussions of the film – among them Haile Gerima's stylised timeslip drama *Sankofa* (1993), Charles Burnett's 1996 TV film *Night-john*, and of course the hugely influential 1977 miniseries adaptation of Alex Haley's *Roots*, which not only crystallised the modern American consciousness of slavery but also established a palatable visual code for representing its horrors. For McQueen, the key to his work is to tell Northup's story as directly and matter-of-factly as possible. For him, the key is this: "No sentimentality. People say, 'How can he make this environment so beautiful, yet what is happening is so horrific?' Have you ever been to Louisiana? It's so beautiful – but the most horrible things happen in the most beautiful places. I'm not making a horror film here – I'm not asking [DP] Sean Bobbitt, 'Can you put a dark lens on that?' We cannot put a filter on our history, our reality – we have to show it as it is."

BITTER CROP
One key aspect of *12 Years a Slave* is its emphasis on the fact that slavery was a highly organised commercial system that subjected human beings to a formalised industrial process, in much the same way as the cotton they had to handle



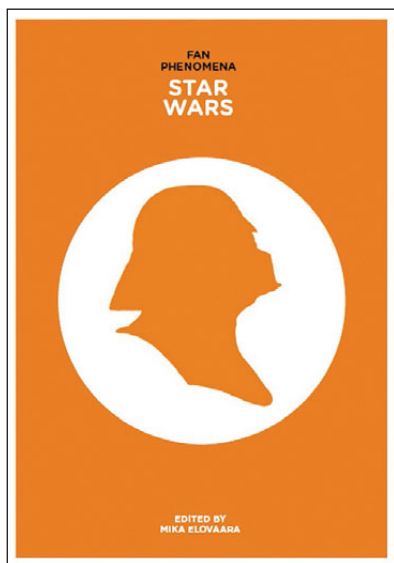
12 Years a Slave is released in the UK on 10 January and is reviewed on page 91

FAN PHENOMENA

A NEW BOOK SERIES FROM INTELLECT THAT 'DECODES' ICONS OF POPULAR CULTURE.
WRITTEN BY AND FOR THOSE OF A PASSIONATE DISPOSITION.

Fan Phenomena Star Wars

Edited by Mika Elovaara
ISBN: 978-1-78320-022-1
£14.95 / \$20



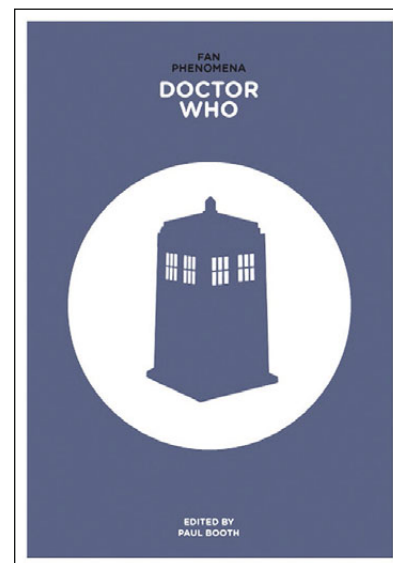
Fan Phenomena Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Edited by Jennifer K. Stuller
ISBN: 978-1-78320-019-1
£14.95 / \$20



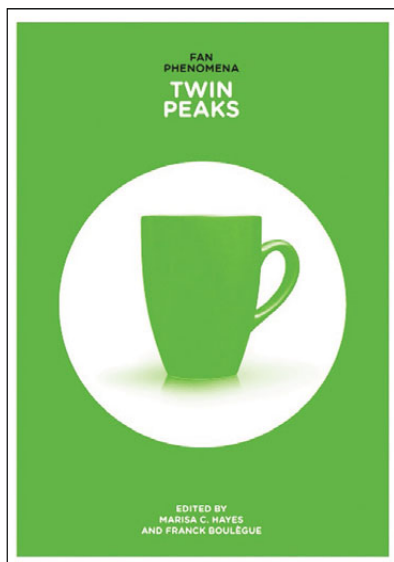
Fan Phenomena Doctor Who

Edited by Paul Booth
ISBN: 978-1-78320-020-7
£14.95 / \$20



Fan Phenomena Twin Peaks

Edited by Marisa C. Hayes
and Franck Boulegue
ISBN: 978-1-78320-024-5
£14.95 / \$20



Fan Phenomena Star Trek

Edited by Bruce Drushel
ISBN: 978-1-78320-023-8
£14.95 / \$20



Fan Phenomena Batman

Edited by Liam Burke
ISBN: 978-1-78320-017-7
£14.95 / \$20



WITH A
FOREWORD BY
WILL
BROOKER



For further information about the series and news of forthcoming titles visit www.intellectbooks.com
Follow progress of all titles by 'liking' the **Fan Phenomena Book Series** page on Facebook

STREET

Robert Altman's *'The Long Goodbye'* recasts Bogart's wise-cracking, lip-curling hard-man Marlowe from *'The Big Sleep'* as a shabby, mumbling insomniac adrift on the mean streets of LA – one of the most memorable in a run of adaptations reconfiguring Chandler's distinctive universe for the big screen

By Kim Newman

Leigh Brackett was one of the few women to publish science fiction in the pulp magazine era, albeit under a gender-neutral byline. She was also unusual among contributors to *Amazing Stories*, *Planet Stories* and *Astounding Science Fiction* in working as a screenwriter; her contributions to fantasy cinema extend eccentrically from *The Vampire's Ghost* (1945), an unusual B picture based on John Polidori's seminal story 'The Vampyre', to the first draft of *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). However, the oddest book-ends to her complicated career are that she has script credits on Howard Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (1946) and Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973). Thus, Brackett helped adapt the 1939 and 1953 novels in which Raymond Chandler introduced and bade farewell to private eye Philip Marlowe (though Chandler dragged Marlowe out again for the hasty *Playback* in 1958 and the uncompleted fragment *The Poodle Springs Story*).

In 1973, the conventional reading of Altman's *The Long Goodbye* was that it was a critique of Chandler's worldview, just as Robert Aldrich had turned Mickey Spillane's fascist bully hero Mike Hammer inside out in *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955). Altman's film is set in the smoggy, muted colour 1970s, photographed through a suitable haze by Vilmos Zsigmond, rather than the gorgeous, rainy noir-look monochrome 1940s of *The Big Sleep*.

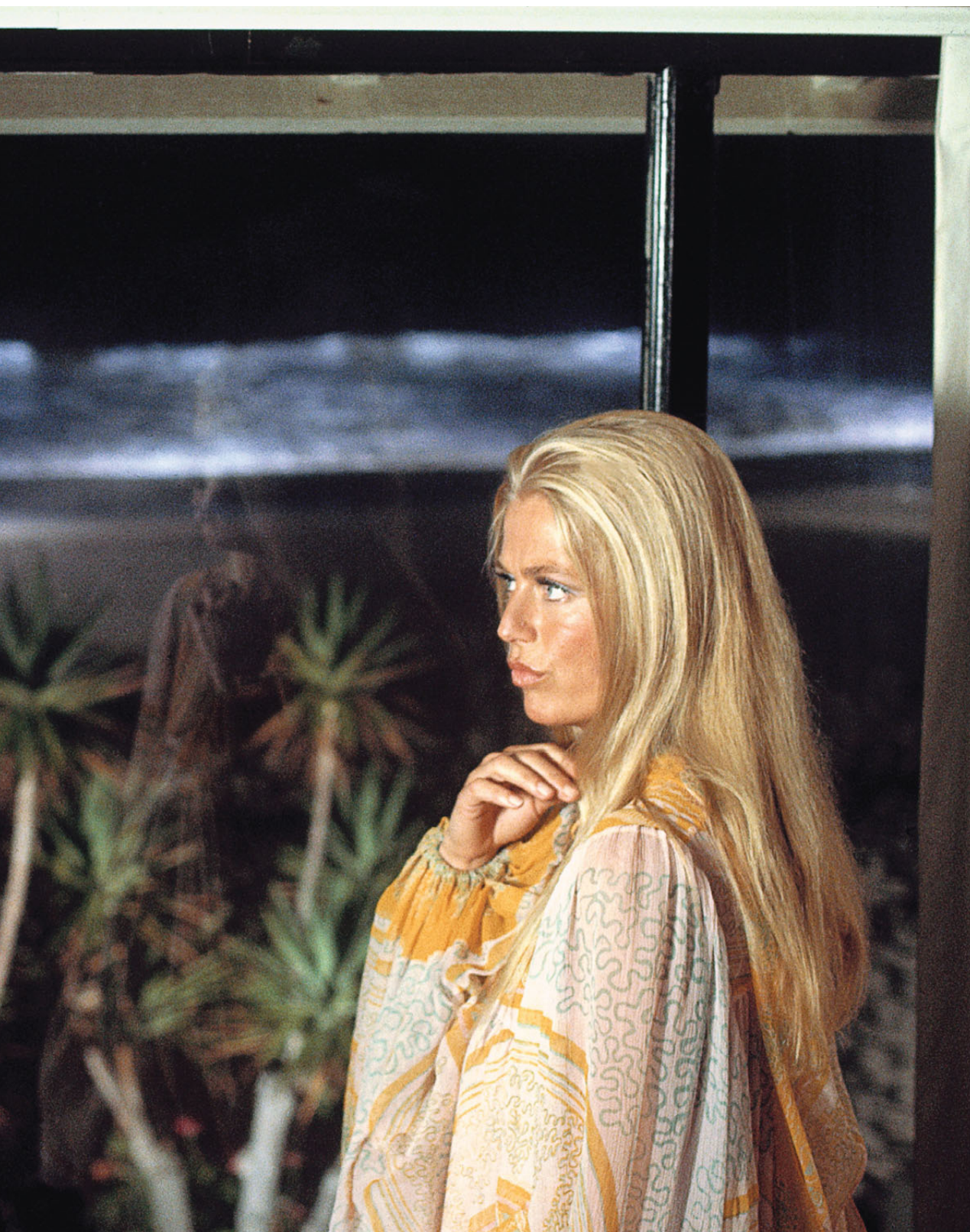
Hawks casts Humphrey Bogart as Chandler's white knight of the mean streets. The star plays the role with a lip-curl and a smart mouth, trading sexually charged banter with every dame in sight – even a female cabbie perks up when Bogey slides into her back seat – and finally hooking up with innocent party Vivian Rutledge (Lauren Bacall) in a reprise of Hawks's earlier *To Have and Have Not* (1945) and the couple's real-life romance.

Altman's Marlowe is a shabby-suited, mumbling insomniac played by Elliott Gould, who can't even keep a cat, is treated as asexual by the stoned nude hippie chicks who live in the apartment opposite and is tagged as 'a born loser' by his only friend, who has ruthlessly exploited him to get away with murder. Bogart is always in control and keeps running into characters who engage in flirtatious tough talk with him as if they were playing verbal chess. Gould can't get anyone to play with him, except perhaps the security guard of a gated community (Ken Sansom) who only lets through



REF: NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)

LEGAL



MARLOWE VARIATIONS
(Clockwise from left) Elliott Gould as Philip Marlowe, with Nina van Pallandt as Eileen Wade in *The Long Goodbye*; Humphrey Bogart in *The Big Sleep*; and Robert Mitchum in *Farewell, My Lovely*

people who identify his impersonations of old movie stars. On the few occasions Gould uses a Chandler line (cornered by two cops, Marlowe says: "Is this where I'm supposed to say, 'What is all this about?' and he says, 'Shut up, I ask the questions.'") no one pays attention. Gould's Marlowe keeps muttering, and people ignore him or talk over his head or behind his back. If he went down a mean street, he'd step in something.

In the 1970s, private eyes tended to be absurd, often ineffectual protagonists, as exemplified by J.J. Gittes (Jack Nicholson) in Roman Polanski and Robert Towne's *Chinatown* (1974), or Harry Moseby (Gene Hackman) in Arthur Penn and Alan Sharp's *Night Moves* (1975). These investigators might solve the mystery, but answers didn't make them happier, and their personal lives were disastrous... Moseby's wife leaves him for a man who takes her to Eric Rohmer movies ("I saw a Rohmer movie once – it was kind of like watching paint dry," says Moseby) and Gittes is an ineffectual witness to the perpetuation of the corrupt monstrosity of Noah Cross (John Huston).

On television, things were mellower, but Jim Rockford (James Garner) and Harry O (David Janssen) were still more often beaten up, swindled by clients and disappointed by feckless friends than allowed to triumph. The Marlowe of Chandler's *The Big Sleep* and *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) – like Hammett's Sam Spade – is a loner who knows better than to take a rap for a femme fatale, whereas his 70s successors are trapped by their circles of friends, enemies, clients and family members.

But Chandler didn't stand still as a writer: the Marlowe of *The Big Sleep* has become wearier by the time of *The Long Good-Bye* (that prissy hyphen is typical of the Dulwich College old boy). A strand of the novel lost in Altman's pruning is Marlowe's break-up with practically the only other continuing character in the books, Bernie Ohls from the district attorney's office, of whom the detective asks one favour too many. The clear-eyed cynicism of the younger Marlowe has become melancholy and ruminative, which means the book has more pages and more depth... and it takes Marlowe longer to see through a less baffling mystery.

Of the films adapted from his novels, Chandler expressed a preference for Edward Dmytryk's *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), with Dick Powell as a Marlowe who has much of the early books' wry insolence and real, if suppressed, anger. In 1954, Powell reprised the role on TV in an adaptation of *The Long Good-Bye* aired on the anthology series *Climax!* – though it seems not to have survived.

Brackett must have noticed Hawks and Altman both set out to betray Chandler in similar ways, transforming the author's distinctive world into playgrounds for auteur visions. Hawks, who also had William Faulkner and Jules Furthman on hand to turn out multiple drafts, liked to rewrite and improvise on set, shaping scenes that crackle with character but add up to a film that famously refuses to make sense. (One oft-repeated anecdote has it that Hawks and his screenwriters were so confused about the convolutions of the plot that they asked Chandler for clarification whether the chauffeur had killed himself or been murdered. Chandler later wrote to a friend: "They sent me a wire... asking me, and dammit I didn't know either.") But it's less often noted that Hawks's original cut of the film (shown only to services audiences a few months before its release) explains all its plot points in a



WATCHING THE DETECTIVES (Clockwise from top) Bogart and Bacall in Hawks's 1946 *The Big Sleep*; Altman with Gould and Van Pallandt on the set of *The Long Goodbye*; Dick Powell and Anne Shirley with Miles Mander (seated) in Edward Dmytryk's 1944 *Murder, My Sweet*

long chatty scene the director-producer dropped to make room for more crowd-pleasing Bogart-Bacall dialogue.

Altman, similarly, uses the script as a launch pad and encourages improvisation, highlighting random overheard snatches of talk (his sound mixes are fiendishly contrived to seem casual) at the expense of plot details. Crucially, both films tinker with the mysteries. Hawks was prevented by the Hays Office from having Vivian's nymphomaniac junkie sister Carmen turn out to be the killer – as that would have made Vivian, Marlowe's lover, an accessory to murder, which breached the production code – and calmly pinned the crime on someone else. A close look at the finale of *The Big Sleep* raises the possibility that the director thwarted the censors by making the ending *more* immoral, hinting that Carmen is still guilty. Marlowe has not only let someone else (a vile gangster) take the rap, but contrived to have the fall guy get machine-gunned by his own men.

Altman, presumably not pressured by censorship, also exonerates Chandler's chosen culprit – in almost all the Marlowe books, the strongest female character turns out to be the killer, which eventually devalues them as whodunits – and makes the wretched Terry (Jim Bouton) guilty of murdering his wife, though Marlowe has suffered for believing in his innocence. Like Bogart, Gould shows a vigilante streak – personally and shockingly gunning down the hammock-lounging lunk, then danc-



BE NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)

ing off to 'Hooray for Hollywood' on the assumption he can't be charged with murdering someone who has already faked their death and doesn't legally exist.

The oddest reaction to Altman's film, expressed in almost all contemporary reviews, is the assumption that updating Marlowe to the 1970s is somehow a radical notion. Only four years earlier, Paul Bogart's *Marlowe* (1969) was taken as a regular adaptation, though that has James Garner's tan proto-Rockford Marlowe share office space in the Bradbury Building with a gay hairdresser and set loose in a contemporary, counterculture-inflected LA he surveys with amused detachment.

Currently, two TV series reimagine the Sherlock Holmes stories with contemporary settings – an approach that was, for much of the character's history, the default way of treating him (before the 1950s, only two out of nearly 100 Holmes adaptations had Victorian settings). No one would make a period-set Chandler film until Dick Richards's *Farewell, My Lovely* (1975), with Robert Mitchum saggy inside a trenchcoat (he would have been an ideal Marlowe in 1946). Mitchum's other essay in the role, Michael Winner's *The Big Sleep* (1978), would bewilder folks so much with the arbitrary shift of locale to London and the Home Counties that few noted it was also set in the 70s.

Richards's film is still the only theatrically released Chandler adaptation set in period; it demonstrates the problem of fidelity. Chandler called Los Angeles "a city with all the personality of a paper cup" and insists on the ugliness and superficiality of Marlowe's mean streets, but the neon-lit 1940s retro-noir nostalgia trimmings and languid saxophone score of *Farewell, My Lovely* are immensely appealing. An alcoholic's den, which is squalid in Dmytryk's film is a treasure trove of old radio sets, furniture, photographs and magazines in Richards's remake. Hawks's film, with its jaunty score and silver-on-black rain, is a seductive fantasy rather than a *noir* nightmare, establishing Marlowe as a game avatar-like identification figure – an approach taken to extremes in the subjective camera experiment of Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake* (1946), which allows the audience to kiss Audrey Totter and spot the killer (watch out for the interesting incidental woman).

Altman lacks Chandler's puritanism, but his Los Angeles is closer to the author's city than any other director. It's a world of all-night thrift markets that don't stock the brand of catfood Marlowe's choosy pet insists on, freeways stretching between distant nowhere-in-particular locales, enclaves of the unhappy and violent rich, crooked drying-out clinics where alibis can be purchased for a cash down-payment, crowded and scuffed police stations full of irritable folk (including David Carradine, busted for possession and ranting, "Someday all the pigs gonna be in here and all the people gonna be out there").

John Williams (before he went over to the Dark Side) and Johnny Mercer provide a song that is literally heard throughout, in arrangements from musak to Mexican funeral band, creating an unshakable earworm. An indulgence in the novel is Chandler's self-portrait in the person of alcoholic novelist Roger Wade. Altman compounds this by casting Sterling Hayden – an actor who was also a drunk, a novelist and a seaman, and who was wracked with lasting guilt over his showing before the House Un-American Activities Committee – and allow-



Elliott Gould's Marlowe keeps muttering, and people ignore him or talk over his head or behind his back. If he went down a mean street, he'd step in something

ing him to write or improvise his own scenes, hijacking a section of the film for an unflinching self-portrait.

Altman teases readers familiar with the book by pausing briefly in a party scene where Chandler has Marlowe meet the major characters Linda and Dr Loring. The director holds the camera on two extras (one is Carl Gottlieb, screenwriter of *Jaws*) we might take to be the Loring, only to move on before they get a word in, shedding another whole strand of Marlowe's life (in *Poodle Springs*, Marlowe is married to Linda) while Wade/Hayden makes a scene. Gangster Marty Augustine (Mark Rydell) makes a point by smashing a bottle in his girlfriend's face and telling Marlowe, "That's someone I love. And you I don't even like," while diminutive quack Dr Verringer (Henry Gibson) slaps six-foot-six hulk Wade across the face in public and cows the bullish giant into paying a debt... these instances of facial assault, practically the only violent moments in the film before the punchline, echo the photos we don't see of what was done to the murder victim Sylvia Lennox and serve to ground the movie, making it hard to enjoy in the way we all love *The Big Sleep*. Hawks could poison Elisha Cook Jr, but he'd never have smashed a bottle into Dorothy Malone's face, forcing her to be masked and braced in later scenes. Jo Ann Brody, bleeding profusely, drifts through, not understanding what has happened, like some refugee from *Carrie*.

And yet, 40 years changes things. *The Long Goodbye* is a key film in Thom Andersen's montage movie *Los Angeles Plays Itself* and Gould's lost world has accrued its own nostalgic appeal – the apartment Augustine sneers at seems a desirable space, even without the sweet hippie neighbours – which mingles with nostalgia for a Hollywood that would greenlight such an odd project. Glimpsed among Augustine's gang of hoods is a young, unbilled Arnold Schwarzenegger – he strips off his shirt to show his pecs to balance the scenes in which Marlowe's neighbours do nude yoga in long-shots. Along with Williams and Gottlieb, the body-builder would ride changes in the movie business that made films like *The Long Goodbye* much harder to find within a few years of its release.



The Long Goodbye is out now on dual-format DVD and Blu-ray from Arrow Academy

SHOOTING THE PAST

For half a century Raymond Depardon has been filming and photographing France and the wider world. His latest documentary, *Journal de France*, juxtaposes his unique archives with the travelogue of a contemporary camper van tour of his native land

By Kieron Corless

"A hunter of images" is how Claudine Nougaret describes the renowned 71-year-old French director Raymond Depardon, who also happens to be her husband, and with whom she's been working since the late 80s doing the sound on his films. Their latest collaboration, *Journal de France*, marks Depardon's 50-year career as both director – primarily of documentaries – and celebrated stills photographer (he co-founded the Gamma agency and worked for Magnum), and plays out numerous implications of Nougaret's resonant phrase.

She takes up the story. "For many years Raymond had been keeping all these archives. As we are the producers of our films, we own all this. He'd always thought of doing something with this material, but I'd thought it was nostalgic, too bound up with the past." In the end, the idea they came up with was a simple one: Nougaret would film Depardon as he travelled round France in a camper van taking stills for a 2013 photography exhibition, intercut with chronologically arranged "snatches of memory" from that archive, outtakes from his vast filmography, with a smattering of explanatory voiceover.

So in *Journal de France*, present counterpoints past, together with a few other structuring dualisms – still and moving image, France and the outside world (often former French colonies in Africa), you might even say husband and wife. "The most difficult part was using him as an actor, because he's never had a calling for this kind of job," Nougaret says. "He would rather be on the other side of the camera. So he would constantly run off and check the framing to help me, and I had to keep pushing him back into the shot."

It's not the first time Depardon has been in front of the camera, but even behind it he has a reputation for self-effacement; after an explosive start to his career through globe-trotting reportage, heavily under the influence of Leacock and Pennebaker, he's steadily built a reputation as one of the most distinctive exponents of observational documentary. The best-known examples in the UK are his *Profils Paysans* trilogy (the third part was released in UK cinemas as *Modern Life* in 2009), painstaking portraits of farmers, a class on the verge of extinction, in and around the Rhône-Alpes region where he grew up.

But there's a lot more besides that, including a few fiction features, and in that sense *Journal de France*, as well as being a recording of overlooked pockets of contemporary provincial France, also functions as a career survey, a biography and an introduction to his films. It traffics lightly in a couple of loose fictions: that Depardon set out on his journey alone, leaving Nougaret at home to sift the archive; occasionally he'll talk out loud to himself, as if

there's no interlocutor. In fact, Depardon himself did the heavy lifting in the archive: Nougaret then edited and supplied a voiceover. It's hard to pinpoint why, but the two elements of the film do complement each other, Depardon's search for "remnants of the past" shifting, sometimes disconcertingly, into riveting, brilliantly selected scenes that seem to well up from some collective unconscious, the darker recesses of the 20th century. "Each of us was trying to pull on their side," says Nougaret. "He wanted more to work on the archive, and I wanted more to have this journey through France. Anyway, it's France, but then it's the rest of the world through France. Raymond has always been working around the world, so it was a way of taking him as a medium to look out at it."

The chronological structure of the archive footage is ideal, revealing shifts in style and technique, different film stocks, the development of a mode of confronting the world. Some of the earliest handheld footage Depardon shot shows a busy Parisian street and a bridge where a crowd has gathered. The viewer can sense the young, avid provincial *naïf* gobbling up the sights, especially a couple of snappily dressed black men, before alighting flirtatiously on a beautiful blonde, letting his camera shift slowly to her legs and high-heeled shoes. This is an embodied, libidinal gaze: it's much easier to discern the personality behind it than in the detached, rarefied one cultivated later. It also encapsulates prominent elements of the Depardon sensibility in his early and mid periods – the sensuality Nougaret refers to in her voiceover, most clearly expressed in the magnificent films he made in Africa (which have drawn comparisons with Jean Rouch), together with an incautious desire to be in the thick of things, as we see in the next bit of footage, taken during unrest in Venezuela in 1963, where havoc clearly reigns. Famously nomadic, Depardon also seemed to have the journalist's instinct for being in the right place, for capturing history unfolding before our eyes – a shellshocked

THE HUNTER STRIKES
Raymond Depardon in action as a still photographer, above; and below, in the camper van he drives around the country for *Journal de France*





Prague as Russian tanks prepare to roll in, French mercenaries during the Biafran war, Papa Doc in Haiti, the West Bank, Central African Republic, Chile, two years on his own with Tubu rebels in Chad. The list goes on and on.

Depardon also made numerous films back home, notably much-discussed studies of national institutions in the mould of Frederick Wiseman (with whom he is good friends), especially the police (*Faits divers*, 1983), the law (*Délit flagrants*, 1994), and politics (1974: *une partie de campagne*) – this last a study of Giscard d'Estaing's election campaign that year. This is the film picked out in Nougaret's voiceover in which Depardon's "listening and looking" direct-cinema method flowered, so that Giscard seems to have forgotten the camera and gives rein to his monumental cynicism and narcissism. Giscard had the film banned on assuming the presidency, and over the years Depardon's ability to nail uncomfortable truths has landed him in hot water, even a couple of spells in jail.

I ask Nougaret about Depardon's politics, which seem more overt since he recently undertook a commissioned portrait of the Socialist President Hollande. "It's true that Raymond has a commitment that is more and more obvious and accepted. But when he started, he would say, 'I'm a journalist, I can't choose one side or the other.' But his commitment is not militancy, he wouldn't go and sign petitions, he just shows French institutions to give an insight into them and inform people."

Journal de France also stands as a document of a director's working practices, the craftsmanship and sheer graft involved. Nougaret expends some time on observing him observing, and setting up his shots laboriously on a view camera (someone else handled the sound on this occasion). "I had a passion for direct sound, this decisive moment, and he had the same for images – that's originally what brought us together," Nougaret says. "It's

about how much you trust reality and think reality is good enough for being filmed. We've always been seeking this perfect quality, trying to reach a level of quality of aesthetics for the image and the sound." Depardon in the film is alert to the problems inherent in a beautiful image. "This light is too flattering and lovely, it's risky," he mutters at one point. This disciplined, rigorous approach to an aesthetic standard seems to have an ethical dimension, apparently linked to Depardon's vaunted capacity to vanish before his subject – as if through sheer concentration he becomes subsumed into the work. "A reporter has to be a fly on the wall, and get people to forget you," explains Nougaret. "It's as difficult to film farmers as to film a president, they too don't want to be filmed either. You really do have to be able to disappear."

That's a useful trick for any hunter, but on the evidence in *Journal de France*, being a hunter of images has its downside, is an affliction of sorts. What is Depardon searching for in his archive, what hidden pattern or meaning? We're never told. A combination of curiosity and dissatisfaction seems to drive him on, at an age when most people are winding down their careers or resting on their laurels. "Some days I feel lousy," says Depardon in his camper van, setting a melancholy undertone for his *tour de France*.

A sense of solitariness and disconnectedness hangs over the enterprise; he talks of being "in orbit somewhere", and elsewhere a "stranger in my own land". Is that a cause or symptom of the image-hunter's necessary detachment? Either way, the work continues. "*Journal de France* is a kind of landmark for us," says Nougaret, "a kind of retrospective of 50 years. Now that's it over, let's get to something new."



Journal de France is released on 31 January and is reviewed on page 82

Depardon seems to have the journalist's instinct for being in the right place, for capturing history unfolding before our eyes



HOUR OF THE WOLF
Martin Scorsese (right)
teams with Leonardo
DiCaprio for the fifth time
in *The Wolf of Wall Street*,
which charts the rise and
fall of real-life stockbroker
swindler Jordan Belfort



For all its apparent echoes of his previous work, Scorsese's 'The Wolf of Wall Street' sees the director expand his range, experimenting with a new vein of social comedy that helps capture the American zeitgeist as strongly as 'Goodfellas' and 'Casino' – this time not as gangster noir but as black farce

By Ian Christie

BIRTH OF A SALESMAN

Surely Scorsese has been here before? That opening confession – “The year I turned 26, I made 49 million dollars, which really pissed me off because it was three shy of a million a week” – immediately recalls Henry Hill’s “As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a gangster” at the beginning of *Goodfellas* (1990). So is Leonardo DiCaprio’s Jordan Belfort just the preppy descendant of Ray Liotta’s eager apprentice wise guy? A junk-bond trader taking advantage of lax regulation and gullible investors to realise another version of the same dream that inspired Hill three decades earlier. A fast ride through a descending spiral of guilt-free hedonism and depravity.

The parallels are striking, as an initially innocent DiCaprio learns the ropes, first in Wall Street stockbroking, then in selling worthless ‘penny stocks’, enabling him to rise even faster and more ruthlessly than Liotta through the ranks. There are also frequent reminders of *Goodfellas*’ darker successor, *Casino* (1995). When DiCaprio first sees the stunning Margot Robbie at a party, he’s as transfixed as De Niro when he first sees Sharon Stone, and both films duly register this fateful fascination. There’s even an orgiastic stag-trip to Las Vegas, after DiCaprio secures his trophy bride, as if



to remind us of what the party town became after the *Casino* era.

But for all the parallels and echoes, the tone of *The Wolf of Wall Street* is very different. Where the earlier films were brash and brutal, shot through with shockingly casual violence carried out in dark places, this is a black comedy, as befits the post-crash era (like Woody Allen's *Blue Jasmine*). Fuelled by its hero's escalating appetite for money and drugs, it careers through what now seems an early stage of the financial chaos that would eventually bring ruin to millions. And in doing so, it mocks one of the mainsprings of American society. For Belfort is a salesman par excellence, and in DiCaprio's supercharged performance he repeatedly goads his sales forces into a frenzy of greed that is both orgasmic and ecstatic.

Having started his Wall Street career as a junior 'master of the universe' on Black Monday, the very day in 1987 when global stock markets plummeted, a suddenly unemployed Belfort had no option but to reinvent himself, and in Terence Winter's screenplay, based on Belfort's own self-serving memoir, he is seen introducing high-pressure Wall Street sales techniques to the gullible customers of a sleepy Long Island dealership. This is not the wealthy Long Island of Gatsby's mansion, nor even its squalid 'valley of ashes' wasteland through which the gilded rich pass en route to New York, but a nondescript suburban mall where Belfort arrives as an exotic exile. The key difference from *Wall Street* – where Belfort has already learned that nobody knows what drives stock values, but that what matters is to keep selling – is that the fees for selling penny stocks in bulk are colossal. His oddball colleagues are soon in awe of his cold-call phone technique and he has no difficulty in attracting the first of many hundreds of kamikaze salesmen, led by his first recruit, Jonah Hill's seemingly innocent Donnie Azoff (representing Belfort's actual sidekick Danny Porush), who becomes his closest partner in drug-crazed mayhem.

Like Fitzgerald's Gatsby, Belfort knows that image is vital, and the brokerage firm he launches as 'Stratton Oakmont' aims to suggest solid values, while the behaviour encouraged among the sales force is that of a depraved frat-house, complete with hazing, strippers and the notorious Friday afternoon dwarf-throwing competitions.

Meanwhile, his own lifestyle soon outstrips even Gatsby's partying, culminating in addiction to Quaaludes and cocaine, a wrecked Ferrari and a near-suicidal yacht voyage in a Mediterranean storm.

Belfort's rampage through the early 1990s is largely based on his own boastful memoir, written while serving a minimal prison sentence and apparently the basis of his subsequent career as a 'motivational speaker' – shades of the one-time drug dealer Howard Marks and the fictional Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* – but it also draws on many filmic traditions, some of which Scorsese has already made his own. Winter also has impressive form in these genres, being best known for his work as a key writer and producer on *The Sopranos*, and subsequently creator of *Boardwalk Empire*, the HBO series about corruption in 1920s Atlantic City, for which Scorsese directed the pilot in 2009.

The power that racketeers gained during America's prohibition era is perhaps an over-familiar theme in American cinema, starting with the explosive gangster movies of the early 1930s, and updated in the *Godfather*

The behaviour encouraged among the sales force is that of a depraved frat-house, complete with hazing, strippers and the notorious Friday afternoon dwarf-throwing competitions

trilogy and Scorsese's *Goodfellas* and *Casino*, followed by the exploration of gangsters' social hinterland that the series format of *The Sopranos* and *Boardwalk Empire* has made possible. But DiCaprio's Belfort is hardly a classic gangster, even if his dress-sense recalls De Niro's flamboyance in *Casino*, and his fencing with Kyle Chandler's FBI agent is in the tradition of such relationships between policemen and mobsters. In fact, he belongs to an even older tradition of selling the improbable to the gullible – one that stretches from the snake-oil salesmen of the Old West and master showman P.T. Barnum, up to David Mamet's hard-driving realtors in his classic 1984 play *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Like Mamet's desperate, unscrupulous salesmen, Belfort's minions are taught to do whatever it takes to close a deal.

Their mantra of excess most obviously recalls Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* (1987) – and given the evidence that real-life stockbrokers took style cues from that film, it may well have helped shape the culture of Stratton Oakmont. But the most distinctive feature of *The Wolf of Wall Street* is the missionary zeal that DiCaprio brings to whipping up a feeding frenzy among the sales force. And this suggests a link to another long tradition in American culture: that of the inspirational preacher. In the 1920s, Aimee Semple McPherson pointed the way, with her pioneering use of radio to spread her Foursquare Gospel, which she preached weekly to thousands in Los Angeles. Her influence would be felt in cinema when Cecil B. DeMille made *The Ten Commandments* in 1923, responding to a wave of popular piety. Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry* made the link between salesmanship and evangelism explicit, and in Richard Brooks's great 1960 film, Burt Lancaster memorably brings his ruthless salesman's shtick to Sister Sharon's evangelical tent-show. The subsequent history of televangelism has not only reached deep into American politics, but is rich in examples of vast success leading to corruption. Jim and Tammy Faye

SWEET SMELL OF EXCESS
DiCaprio with Jonah Hill, who plays his partner Donnie Azoff; giving a speech at one of his bacchanalian drug-fuelled parties; and with Margot Robbie as his wife Naomi



Bakker were perhaps the highest-profile examples of this trend in the 1980s, when the proceeds of their *The PTL Club* TV show and theme park Heritage USA were revealed to be funding a lavish lifestyle.

Frances FitzGerald's verdict in a 1987 *New Yorker* article on the Bakkers' fall from grace could have been written for Belfort and Porush a decade later: "They epitomized the excesses of the 1980s; the greed, the love of glitz, and the shamelessness; which in their case was so pure as to almost amount to a kind of innocence." It's precisely this innocence that DiCaprio radiates – just as he gave Howard Hughes an unexpected vulnerability in *The Aviator* (2004) – both in the set-piece harangues to his growing army of employees, and in the drug-fuelled excesses of his personal life. An early scene with his first mentor, a Wall Street broker and true disciple of Gordon Gekko, played with bouffant-haired insouciance by Matthew McConaughey, initiates Belfort into stock-selling as a truly weird cult, built on sex, alcohol, drugs and chanting. Like us, Belfort hardly knows how to take the mumbo-jumbo he's being given by an accredited master of the universe, but it's clear that we are landing on a planet where self-belief is everything.

Like DiCaprio's Hughes, his Belfort retreats into an increasingly paranoid state, where his alcohol and drug use – an exotic mixture of "cocaine, Quaaludes, Xanax, Paxil, uppers, downers, all arounders", according to the real Belfort – insulate him from any recognisable reality. Only Terry Gilliam in his underrated *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998), based on Hunter S. Thompson's equally drug-saturated memoir, has succeeded in conveying such total sensory dislocation. But what's perhaps most subversive about the extended sequences of Belfort and Azoff's antics is that they're played as comedy. Although many small investors were undoubtedly conned out of their life savings by Stratton Oakmont, the only victims we see in *The Wolf of Wall Street* are Belfort and Azoff and



GREED IS GOOD
DiCaprio gets his initiation into the cult of stock-selling early in the film from Wall Street broker and Gordon Gekko disciple Mark Hanna, played by Matthew McConaughey

their immediate families, as they descend into a *folie à deux* that is painfully funny, and brilliantly performed by DiCaprio and Jonah Hill.

Is this irresponsible of Scorsese and DiCaprio, who was heavily involved in securing the rights to Belfort's book (apparently in competition with Brad Pitt)? The 'Wolf of Wall Street', as Belfort was once dubbed by *Forbes* magazine, may ultimately appear more of a monkey or a clown, but does his carnival of excess not amount to a vindication – helped by the obvious fact that the film has mightily boosted his post-prison career as a motivational speaker (recent web postings record him addressing finance professionals and college audiences, offering a revised mantra that "greed is not enough")? Don't we, in short, get a vicarious thrill from living the high – and low – life through DiCaprio/Belfort?

Similar charges were levelled against both *Goodfellas* and *Casino*, and indeed against the fictional *Taxi Driver*, accusing these of glamorising the violence their protagonists mete out. But compared with many equally violent films offering only perfunctory evidence that crime doesn't pay, these can now be seen in hindsight to engage substantially with what drives their characters, and what motivates our identification.

This issue of using real lives dates back in Scorsese's career to *Raging Bull* (1980), in which Jake LaMotta's life story was reshaped to create a simplified arc of the boxer's rise and fall. Subsequently, four of his films have been directly based on biographical material (*Goodfellas*, *Casino*, *Kundun* and *The Aviator*) while others have mixed real lives with fiction (*Bringing Out the Dead*, *Gangs of New York*, *Hugo*), not to mention the growing number of documentaries about filmmakers and musicians. There can be little doubt that Scorsese draws strong inspiration from documented lives and their settings; and it has long been clear that the archetypal form of a Scorsese film is in fact what German scholars dubbed the *Bildungsroman*, or story of a character's growth from youth to adulthood.

Whether semi-factual or fictional, the majority of Scorsese's films are just this, tracking their almost invariably male protagonists through formative experiences, as they make their way in an often treacherous world. It was the energy and raw emotion of his earliest essays in this vein, *Who's That Knocking at My Door?* (1968) and *Mean Streets* (1973), which first made Scorsese a hero for the post-New Wave generation, and he has returned to it at times in his career when in need of creative renewal – with *After Hours* (1985) and *Bringing out*



the *Dead* (1999). So for long-term Scorsese watchers, the question has to be: what does *The Wolf of Wall Street* add to the canon?

Part of the answer lies in DiCaprio's growing stature as an actor, which must owe much to his tutelage under Scorsese's direction since *Gangs of New York* in 2002. In their subsequent four films together, DiCaprio has developed his range to portray the enigmatic Howard Hughes and the traumatised vet of *Shutter Island* (2009). But *The Wolf of Wall Street* returns him to a role he played in the same year as *Gangs*, that of the young conman/fantast Frank Abagnale in Spielberg's *Catch Me If You Can*. While DiCaprio has understandably been proving his dramatic credentials with Scorsese and others, his qualities as a comedian have lain dormant. But in Belfort's improbable career of overindulgence, he has found another trickster figure to play with overweening charm and confidence. And this has given Scorsese the opportunity to create another film that captures the American zeitgeist as surely as *Goodfellas* and *Casino* – not as gangster noir, but as black farce. As Belfort proclaims at the climax of what should be his farewell speech, "Stratton Oakmont is America" – and by this stage we may be ready to agree.

It also offers Scorsese the chance to further hone his uniquely complex filmic syntax. Working with a new cinematographer, Rodrigo Prieto (best known for his work with Alejandro González Iñárritu and Ang Lee), and production designer, Bob Shaw (ex-*Sopranos* and *Boardwalk Empire*, as well as *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*), seems to have produced different textures and a livelier rhythm, with scope for more improvisation than in recent films (as the film's editor, Thelma Schoonmaker, confirms in her interview, right). Some classic situations are revisited with variations, such as the scene in which Belfort first sees Naomi, later his wife, during one of his riotous parties. Comparing this with De Niro

seeing Sharon Stone through surveillance cameras in *Casino*, elaborately choreographed through a series of stylised shots to convey his life-changing reaction, the montage in *Wolf* is simpler, but no less effective. Belfort is massaging Azoff's mouth, paralysed by downing too many Quaaludes, when he's urged to look at the chick who's just arrived. Margot Robbie is revealed in an uptilt from her knees, before Belfort registers her stunning appearance, with his reaction accompanied by a chorus of lewd suggestions from his henchmen, and a song that pinpoints the significance of the moment – Romeo Void's 'Never Say Never' – the equivalent of 'Love is Strange' punctuating the scene in *Casino*.

And amid the greater fluidity of *Wolf*, Scorsese has also resumed his use of voiceover, to splendid comic effect. Not only does Belfort narrate his career retrospectively, like his predecessors in *Goodfellas* and *Casino*, but in several places other characters also voice their reactions to what's happening, notably when Jordan throws himself on the mercy of Naomi's English aunt, played with raffish aplomb by Joanna Lumley.

If *The Wolf of Wall Street* takes Scorsese into a new vein of social comedy, this should be an occasion for rejoicing as the director enters his 72nd year, with diverse future projects already under way. The scale of his career now invites comparison with many of the Hollywood greats; but among these, perhaps the most surprising would be Preston Sturges, master of quick-fire repartee and satirical contempt for American humbug. With its reassuring opening TV commercial quickly undercut by scenes of ludicrous debauchery, *The Wolf of Wall Street* surely belongs to the raucous tradition pioneered by Sturges's *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944) and *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*? (1943). Except that here, truth is stranger than satire.



The Wolf of Wall Street is released on 17 January, and is reviewed on page 92

The scale of Scorsese's career now invites comparison with many of the Hollywood greats, but among these perhaps the most surprising would be Preston Sturges, master of quick-fire repartee



LONE WOLF
The character of Jordan Belfort is far from being a classic Scorsese gangster, and DiCaprio plays him with charm and confidence as a mixture of inspirational preacher and snake-oil salesman

LIFE ON THE CUTTING EDGE

Scorsese's editor Thelma Schoonmaker on the importance of improvisation in 'The Wolf of Wall Street' and why the director's guiding principle is never to tell the audience what to think

By Ian Christie

Ian Christie: How different was *The Wolf of Wall Street* from the other films you've worked on with Scorsese?

Thelma Schoonmaker: The improvisations in *Wolf of Wall Street* were an enormous change from our most recent films. Of course *Raging Bull*, *King of Comedy*, *After Hours*, *Goodfellas*, *Casino* and some of *The Departed* relied heavily on improvisation. But not films like *The Aviator*, *Shutter Island* or *Hugo*. My early background in documentaries prepared me for cutting improvisation. In both cases you are presented with raw material that needs to be shaped into a dramatic structure or scene. It's like putting a puzzle together. So it was a delight to have tons of improvisation pouring into my editing room during *Wolf of Wall Street*. I was laughing so hard sometimes at the dailies that my fellow filmmakers came in to see if I was all right.

Things don't necessarily match, but we didn't care about that. We'd rather have a cut that isn't matching and get wonderful lines from the actors. Sometimes the script would have two lines for a scene and then the actors would go to work and it would become a two-minute scene. Marty was delighted to see that the actors could all improvise beautifully, and so he made the daring choice to give them lots of freedom to do that. It meant the film ballooned up to four hours. It worked at that length, but needed to be brought down for distribution. We didn't have to lose entire scenes, which would have been awful, but instead carefully shaved down the film to its present length.

Marty could be heard laughing on the soundtrack of the dailies, as something unexpected happened during the improvs. The sound man was concerned, but I knew that his laughter meant everything to the actors, and it was never a problem to eliminate it.

IC: Many of the actors are new to working with Scorsese, and some are unexpected choices?

TS: I've never edited a film where the actors worked so well together. They were having a great time, of course, but what impressed me was how they settled into their rather dubious characters with such believability, able to convey their obliviousness to how



Thelma Schoonmaker: 'I've never edited a film where the actors worked so well together'

awful what they're saying is. Of course the humour in the film comes from their callous behaviour. I asked Leo [DiCaprio] how he could keep a straight face sometimes because his lines were so outlandish – but absolutely true. Of course, they would burst out laughing sometimes after a take was over. But the way they created a bond between their characters, even with some jealousies, is remarkable. They were working for the film at all times.

One interesting example: Marty and Leo noticed that Matthew McConaughey would warm up for takes by chanting. They looked at each other and agreed immediately to encourage him to make it part of the scene. Now an editor couldn't ask for a better way to transition into a scene than that! Or out of it, with Leo participating in the chant somewhat hesitantly, including bird calls. Then later, the idea of including the chant in Leo's farewell speech was typical of the kind of ideas that were flying around the set.

Marty wanted to immerse the audience in the madness of the world created by Jordan Belfort – not to make just a rise and fall story. He wanted the audience to feel why Jordan was able to entice people into his web and then let the audience make a moral judgment about this world. That's why the FBI agent [played by Kyle Chandler] is introduced slowly and subtly. Marty didn't want a cops

'Marty was delighted to see that the actors could all improvise beautifully, and so he made the daring choice to give them lots of freedom to do that'

and robbers film. This sets up beautifully the scene between the FBI agent and Jordan on the yacht, where Jordan, as usual, thinks he can get away with anything – even bribing a federal law enforcement official.

IC: And the opening commercial for Belfort's company, which is presumably a fake? We're not sure if the film has really started...

TS: Marty was adamant that an ad for Stratton Oakmont begin the film. I was a bit nervous about it at first – but Marty felt strongly that he wanted the audience to not be sure of what was going on – and then figure out that the commercial was part of the film and had a purpose. From the beginning he didn't want to lead the audience, but let them find their way. It was based on the kind of commercial made in the 90s and Marty wanted the contrast between the reassuring tone of the commercial to conflict sharply with the scene that follows – where a dwarf is thrown at a target and you see a crazed bunch of stockbrokers in the height of excess during an end-of-the-month celebration. It's a very efficient way to jump into the movie, and again, the audience has to engage to understand it.

The alternative would have been a narration about Stratton Oakmont, setting the scene for the film. That would have been too conventional for Marty. He wanted the film to be ferocious and unexpected, thus the hyped-up montage that follows, which was very carefully planned shot by shot to thrust the audience into Jordan Belfort's life. Marty's guiding principle in all his films is to never tell the audience what to think, but to make them engage with what they're seeing and hearing. 



1



2

THE HUMAN MACHINE
The body was a favourite plaything of Soviet poster artists, as the Stenberg brothers' design for the 1926 tragicomedy *The Screw from Another Machine* (3) demonstrates. Arms and legs were often mechanised and eyes replaced by cameras, as can be seen in Nikolai Prusakov's 1928 poster for *The Glass Eye* (1) and the Stenbergs' interpretation of Walther Ruttmann's 1927 *Berlin, Symphony of a City* (2)

REVOLUTION IN DESIGN

Though Soviet art is often dismissed as dreary propagandist kitsch, in the 1920s Russian designers revolutionised the art of the film poster, embracing abstraction and surrealism, bringing new techniques and a dizzying dynamism to the form

By Isabel Stevens

"Attention viewers: this film is an experiment," announced Dziga Vertov in the opening credits of *Man with a Movie Camera*. However, most Russian audiences had already been briefed: out in the streets, the delirious, spinning cityscape on the Stenberg brothers' film poster acted as a visual manifesto for Vertov's freewheeling urban tour. Along with other Soviet filmmakers of the time, Vertov fervently believed that cinema must "break out of the theatre and enter the arena of life itself". And throughout the 1920s, before Stalin and socialist realism stifled artistic activity, it did just that. Vladimir and Georgii Stenberg's design is now so familiar and so often pastiche (not to mention rare and expensive in its original form), but in 1929 it was only one of many dizzying, bold film advertisements pasted on Russia's billboards, walls and kiosks. Often produced overnight after a screening, these constructivist designs were more than just promotional materials: they were also artistic experiments in their own right, using montage, repetition, scale and asymmetry just as the films of Vertov, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Barnet and their contemporaries did. For a Russian population that was largely

illiterate, the energy of the nascent Soviet cinema and the endless possibilities it offered was abundantly clear.

Film posters before the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 were hardly uninteresting, but like designs elsewhere in the world, they isolated dramatic and glamorous moments – scenes of romance, betrayal, action or violence. Indebted to movements such as expressionism and art nouveau, painting was their model. Yet, just as directors such as Eisenstein and Vertov regarded the moving image as the antithesis of painting, the Stenberg brothers, Aleksandr Rodchenko and their fellow constructivists declared "art and its priests" illegal. For them the future wasn't the easel and the gallery wall, but the printing press and the streets.

The posters commissioned by Reklam Film, the design department of the state-owned SovKino, headed by poster artist Yakov Ruklevsky, dispensed with the old canvas-imitating order. Instead of a delicate, hand-drawn style, these designs were unashamedly mechanical with their swathes of electric yellows and reds, their sharp, clean lines and their abstract shapes that often overpowered any representational imagery. Meanwhile,



COURTESY GRAD GALLERY FOR RUSSIAN ARTS AND DESIGN

ТРАГИ-
КОМЕДИЯ
в 20 днях

В ГЛ. РОЛЯХ: А.Н. ПАРАМОНОВА И П.П. РЕПНИН
РЕЖИССЕР ТАЛАНОВ
ОПЕРАТОР МИНЕРВИН



2 СЕНБЕРГ 2

Типо-литография "Ника Директ" — Тел. 1-43-43.

Издательство ПРОЛЕТКИНО

Габарит 33/34 Тираж 10.000



4

MOSCOW DYNAMOS
Designers not only experimented with abstract shapes, photomontage and repetition to convey movement; bicycles, trains, planes and cars often figured too, as in Aleksandr Naumov's poster for the 1927 film *Oil* (4). The dynamic antics of Buster Keaton were popular with Soviet audiences and Keaton often appears in the Stenberg brothers' posters, as in these two contrasting designs for 1926's *The General* (5, 6)

typography didn't just impart useful information about titles, stars and cinemas, it marched diagonally across a poster, was sculpted into eyes and around figures, while in some of the most unconventional posters words were the sole component of the design. When human figures did feature, their bodies were fragmented, foreshortened, reduced to silhouettes or turned into machines. But the unifying characteristic of posters of this period was their furious, disorientating sense of dynamism – arising not only from the constructivist's cut-up collage techniques but also from their motifs, in particular the spirals and bicycles that figure so often.

Despite many shared methods and subjects, each designer's posters are recognisably their own (they even bear their signatures – '2 Stenberg 2' can often be spied at the edges of the brothers' designs). The most famous of all the constructivists, Rodchenko, produced only a handful of film posters, but each displays his preference for geometric forms, photo snippets and a staunchly conceptual approach. The Stenberg brothers, meanwhile, were some of the most prolific designers, creating around 300 designs before Georgii's death in a car crash in 1933. They even invented their own machine for



5



6

projecting film frames, which enlarged and scrambled celluloid moments, allowing them to trace kaleidoscopes of topsy-turvy, overlaid actors, with the final results suspended somewhere between photography and drawing. Far from just ephemeral paper stunts to stop passers-by, their designs clearly display a love of cinema and are some of the most playful and eccentric distillations of moving images into static pictures ever created.

Lesser-known artists have often been overlooked but their posters are equally startling: Nikolai Prusakov's unsettling clusters of body parts joined together in surreal fashion as well as his more minimal approach, stranding lone motifs in a sea of colour; Anatoly Belsky and Grigori Borisov's innovative use of film stills, arranged in between bicycle spokes or in place of smoke coming out of a pipe; Aleksandr Naumov's fixation with grids and lines that course across his posters like a projection beam; not to mention the numerous other creators of such formalist fantasies, whose names have since been lost.

i A selection of the posters displayed here and many more will be exhibited in 'KINO/FILM: Soviet Posters of the Silent Screen' at Grad Gallery, London, from 17 January – 29 March

THE ELEVENTH (10) AND THE GENERAL (5) COURTESY GRAD GALLERY



7



8

WORKERS OF THE WORD
Look at Saul Bass's fixation with spirals in his poster and opening credits for Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and you can see the legacy of the hallucinatory swirls found in so many of the Stenbergs' posters, such as that for Dziga Vertov's 1928 documentary celebrating the feats of Soviet construction, *The Eleventh Year* (7), as well as in their designs for German films, *Worldly Couples* (8) and *Death Loop* (9)

PERSONALITY CULT
Each artist had their own signature style; the Stenbergs' designs, including another interpretation of Vertov's *The Eleventh Year* (10), were hand-drawn, their palette often restricted to primary colours; Nikolai Prusakov's minimal posters (*Man of Fire*, 11) were the opposite of many frantic Soviet designs; while Aleksandr Rodchenko used photomontage to stark effect in his poster for Vertov's 1924 *Kino Eye* (12)

OIL (4) AND DEATH LOOP (6): COURTESY GRAD GALLERY AND ANTIKBAR



9



10



11



12

GEORGE A. ROMERO

The director's 1968 low-budget indie classic *Night of the Living Dead* helped reinvent horror cinema for the modern era, setting the tone for the subversive apocalyptic visions that would define his work over the next 45 years. Here, the original king of the zombies recalls what got him started, how his style evolved, why he remains defiant and what he thinks of the new breed of pale-faced imitators. **Interview by James Blackford**

James Blackford: How did you get started as an independent filmmaker and how did you come to make *Night of the Living Dead* [1968]?

George A. Romero: Well, I went to Pittsburgh to go to college at Carnegie Mellon University and met some people. I'd always loved movies – I was always a fan – but I never imagined I'd be able to work professionally in film; I thought you had to be born royalty or something... Carnegie Mellon had a wonderful theatre department but film studies was just watching movies, watching *Battleship Potemkin* and talking about it. There was no equipment, no practical hands-on learning experience. But there were film labs in cities the size of Pittsburgh because the news was [shot] on film at that point. There were three big film labs that processed 8mm, 16mm and 35mm and I used to just go and hang out, and that's where I learned the basics; from these journeyman news guys and the editors who were cutting the newsreels.

Then one day me and a few friends went to an uncle of mine to try and raise \$20,000 to buy a Bolex and a lighting package, and we set up a company to do commercials and industrial films, and over the next couple of years we became very successful at that. We were the only game in town that was doing commercials on film. We got more equipment and eventually we thought we had enough equipment to try to make a movie, a narrative film. So, that's how it happened.

JB: I understand Welles and Hawks were an influence on you. The *Thing from Another World* was a film you enjoyed...

GR: Yeah, I enjoyed *Thing from Another World*, but Welles was more of an influence. When I see *Night of the Living Dead* though, all I can see still are the mistakes! Basic filmmaking 101: eye direction, screen direction and all of those things. I was clueless about all of that. It's typical of a commercial director where you just focus on a shot at a time instead of, even in your head, storyboarding the whole action of the sequence.

JB: But in those early films – I'm also thinking about *Hungry Wives* [AKA *Season of the Witch*, 1972], *The Crazies* [1973], *Martin* [1976]

and *Dawn of the Dead* [1978] – there is a real 'Romero style' that emerges: a lot of cutting, carefully composed shots, depth of field, a focus on details and a lot of music. Was that a style you consciously developed?

GR: It was, and I was better off that way. I used to cover my ass with cuts because if you covered everybody that was talking with single shots you could make the dialogue run any way you wanted it to run, whereas if you've got a master you're stuck with what you've got. So that was my way of putting off decisions. And very often that would save the day. Having those options gave me the ability to develop that frenetic style.

ON GEORGE A. ROMERO

'[Zombies are] almost seen as being like vampires or werewolves... They're not. George came up with this in 1968. Zombies existed in a sort of voodoo way, but he combined it with the cannibal and mixed in a little communicability, and you've got your modern zombie. That was all George's idea... Really, George needs to be canonised for what he did.'

Simon Pegg

'There is something so meaty about Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*. It still stands head and shoulders above most other modern horror. I think it's because it's so smart and that it says everything there is to say... I think it's the *Threads* vibe; the fact that Romero and his collaborators had an actual potential nuclear apocalypse hanging over him. They are not playing about with the themes of *Dawn of the Dead*: they mean it.'

Ben Wheatley, Film4.com

JB: It's a sort of nervous energy that adds to the anxiety of the stories.

GR: I hope so. I thought that it did. But then what happens is, as we started to make films with union crews and needed to compress shoot time, I had to develop more of a traditional way of doing it.

JB: Yes, in the 1980s you developed a more conventional style.

GR: This again was a defence mechanism. I needed to be able to make sure I got the information in a master and tried to choreograph and use camera movement instead of cuts. It was hard to come around to that. The first time I did it with any success was *Bruiser* [2000] maybe.

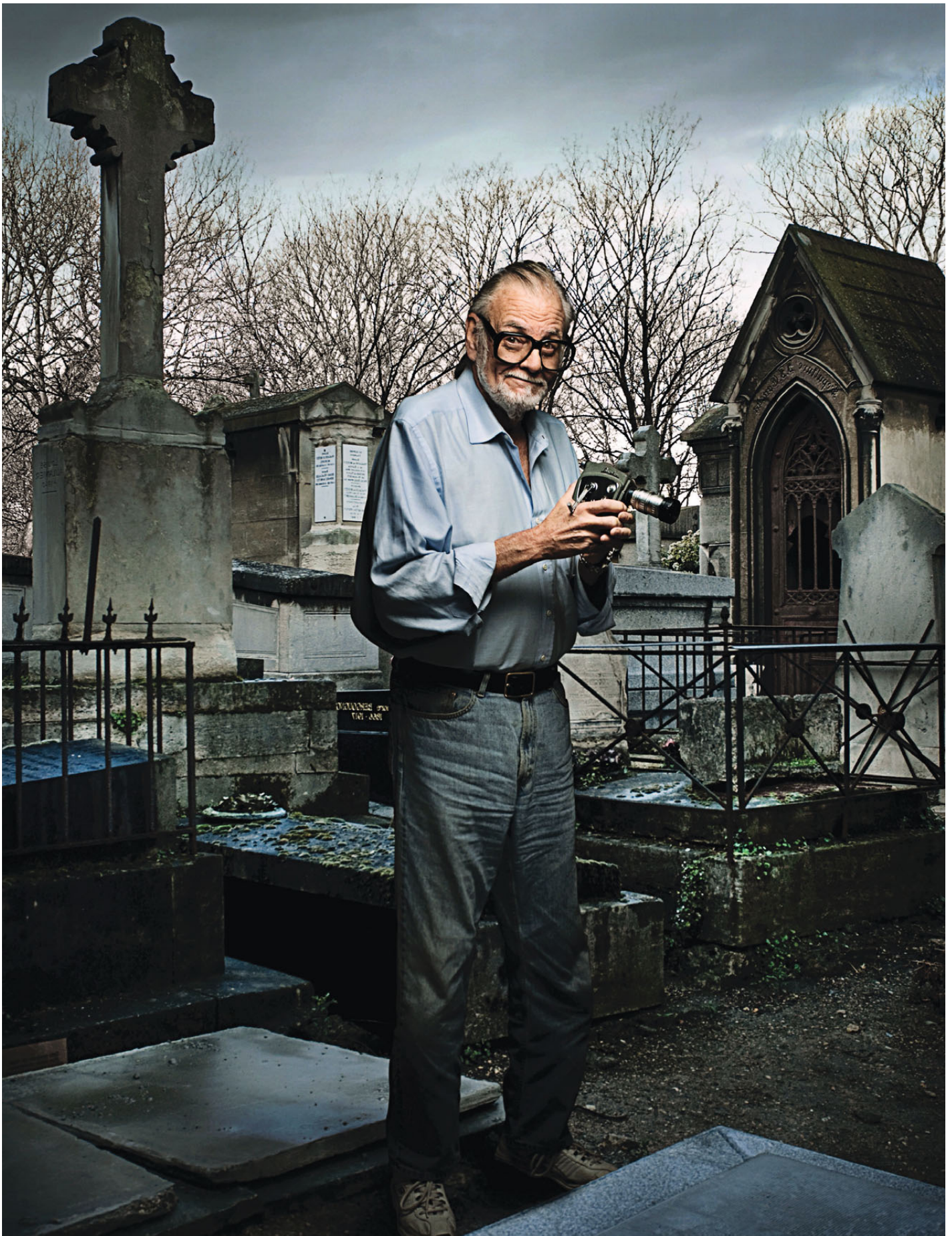
JB: Not *Creepshow* [1982]? That is a bit more conventional in its style.

GR: It is but we weren't pressed financially or schedule-wise with *Creepshow*. So it still has the remnants of the earlier style, and of course the comic-book format enabled me to do different things. Panning from panel to panel... That was just fun!

JB: It's a fun movie. Going back to *Night of the Living Dead*: it's a film that in many ways is the first truly modern horror film. It reflects so much of the unrest of the time – the '68 student riots, the civil rights movement. How much of that was by design, and how much of that was subconscious or a happy accident?

GR: A lot of that was by accident. The main thing people took from *Night of the Living Dead* was that it was a racial statement movie, and that was completely unintended. Completely. When John Russo and I collaborated on that script, in our minds, he was a white guy and when Duane [Jones] agreed to play the role we consciously didn't change the script at all. We thought, we'll be hip and not even notice that he was black. Duane was very aware of it. He was really conscious of being a black guy in this role, and of course because he is black it takes on a completely different personality – a completely different texture and politics. We were a bit blind to it. In fact, I've often





thought we would have been better off to change the script and make race a point. There was a point could be made there. Here is a minority person faced with these redneck people. And that person might become paranoid and make the wrong decision. And he does, he makes the wrong decision, in the end.

JB: Politics also comes into the film in other ways. The disintegration of society and societal norms...

GR: And family. That's really what we were most conscious of, instead of a racial theme.

JB: That's something that continues in your work. *The Crazies* has elements of a satire that looks forensically at how parts of society might behave under extreme circumstances. You see how the politicians relate to the army and how the army deals with the local doctor and the police, and how the locals respond to the baton of authority...

GR: Yeah, I hope it does. That's a theme I keep returning to because I think that is one of the big problems that we have. When I first did *Night of the Living Dead*, I didn't call them zombies... Zombies weren't dead before. I thought, "These people are going to be dead and they're not going to be able to dig their way out of graves because they are too weak." My zombies have never eaten brains! I don't know where that came from. *The Return of the Living Dead* [1985] maybe. Because they could never crack open a skull.

JB: It's en masse that they become a threat.

GR: Yeah exactly, but they're dead, right? So I thought that was a new creature. I never called them zombies. But what I wanted was something amazing, something earth-shaking, an incredible disaster out there – and our people in the house are still concerned with their own little agendas instead of rationally dealing with the problem. Because it's relatively escapable, but they seal their own doom by being too wrapped up in their own concerns. That's the big theme I see all over society. People focused on their own thing. It's like in the US; the politics now are just ridiculous. We're all shooting at each other. That's one of my big concerns about

society in general and I guess that's why it always creeps in. Often a lot of these things are unconscious until it's finally on the page and you're out there staging it, shooting it and really thinking about it. It comes out in the process.

JB: There is a sort of naturalism to the performances in many of your films. I'm thinking about films like *Hungry Wives* and *The Crazies*, where the performances give the films a realism that horror hadn't had before. Details too: in *The Crazies*, the extras in the white radiation suits. In most films they would be background characters, but you make them human. You show them getting frightened. And there is that great shot where one steals a fishing rod. That sort of naturalistic detail seems to me to be a real Romero trait.

GR: It's hard for me to talk about that specifically because so much of that is spontaneous. I'm just always looking for things, you know? Like, this guy is going to walk through here, he might think, "Oh, look at those fishing rods. Why don't I just grab 'em?" Or the scenes of them going through [dead people's] pockets. Maybe that recalls the Holocaust... I wasn't thinking so much about that at that moment, it's just these guys would probably be doing that kind of thing. So, I always throw that in. It's just like with the zombies. In Zack Snyder's remake of *Dawn of the Dead* [2004], they're all dressed the same and are in running shoes. First of all, they shouldn't be running! They're all in blue jeans and running shoes and that's it. But I try to make them nuns or...

JB: Hare Krishnas.

GR: Yeah! Do something with wardrobe to give it a little bit more flavour. Why not, you know?

JB: If we could talk about *Martin*. It's filmed in Pittsburgh on a low budget and with a small crew. I understand it is a favourite of yours.

'In Zack Snyder's remake of Dawn of the Dead, the zombies are in running shoes. First of all, they shouldn't be running!'



The dead zone: *Night of the Living Dead*

GR: It is my favourite film of mine...

JB: It feels like a personal film when you watch it.

GR: Yeah. I would say *Knightriders* [1981] is maybe a bit more personal in that it is a little more about me – my own defiance. I won't say I'm uncompromising but I won't compromise just for the hell of it [laughs].

JB: *Knightriders* is about doing something outside of the normal system and having integrity and believing in what you're doing. Which I guess is an analogy for you as an independent filmmaker?

GR: That's really what I meant, but you said it much better. So, in that sense I don't think *Martin* was as much of a personal film. But I was able to make every shot that I wanted to make. We had a very small crew; the actors were carrying the lights. Everybody was just there to make the movie. And I got every shot I wanted. It's the only time that's ever happened. The sequence where they're on the telephones – when he interrupts the lovers... That whole sequence, I couldn't have done that without that number of shots. I needed those shots to tell that story visually.

JB: That scene is a perfect example of the Romero fast-cutting style.

GR: Yes, it's a good example of that. I needed the shots and I had this dedicated crew that was all about making this film. It was great. That's really why I like that film so much.

JB: And do you feel most comfortable working on your home turf with a small crew who you really know well?

GR: Pretty much, yeah. I've sort of found that again in Toronto. Again, a team of people who I've worked with as long as I've been there. It's great, I have a new family! Pittsburgh, for a while became a production centre. There was one \$400 million year. Hollywood was bringing productions in there. Films like *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Innocent Blood*. So my guys, the guys I worked with, were able to have careers and live at home. But then it dried up and a lot of my friends left.

JB: And you always resisted the move to Hollywood...

GR: Oh I did, yeah. I really didn't want to do that. I've never shot a film there.

JB: Even *Land of the Dead* [2005], which is a studio picture, was shot up in Toronto...

GR: Yeah... it was actually a pick-up. It wasn't a Universal production. We made the deal with an independent producer called Mark Canton and he sold it to Universal. But our original deal was with him.

JB: Did they get involved after the production?

GR: They were starting to be involved during production, but they never made a script change or anything like that. They did insist on cast.

JB: I heard they didn't want a black lead? I guess they had commercial reasons for that...

GR: Yeah, they did. Actually it was Canton first who said that and Universal backed him up. They claim you can't sell a black lead – unless it's Denzel [Washington] – in Europe...

JB: In Europe? Oh, so it's our fault after all...

GR: That's what they think.

JB: Well I guess they have the figures to back it up.

GR: Statistics lie! My reaction was to make Big Daddy, the lead zombie, black. And he is the hero.



Dawn of the Dead

JB: Staying with *Land of the Dead*, it takes on new meaning after the financial crash, what with Dennis Hopper's evil capitalist trying to take the money and run. The anger of the zombies is perhaps analogous to the anger of the people.

GR: We saw the film projected recently and I had those thoughts. The politics of that film are in your face: [adopting a sarcastic tone] "We don't negotiate with terrorists!"

JB: *Dawn of the Dead* is also a comment on the state of the nation. How did the idea to critique consumerism come about?

GR: I resisted for a long time, because people were talking about *Night of the Living Dead* as if it was important, and I thought, "I can't do another one until I have an idea that is not necessarily important but something to satirise at least." Socially I knew the people who were developing this shopping mall – literally the first indoor shopping mall in Pennsylvania. So I went out to visit it before it was even opened and I saw the trucks bringing in everything that you could ever possibly want... And I got the idea right then. I started to noodle on a script and, serendipitously, Dario Argento found me through my agent and called. He had just shown *Night of the Living Dead* out in a field somewhere to a big audience and fell in love with it. He called and said, "You must make another one." So, he brought me to Rome and I wrote the script. We've been friends since then.

JB: What was your budget on *Dawn*?

GR: It was around a million and a half [dollars], I think. Richard Rubinstein, the other producer, found \$700,000, from US sources. Dario's was the first money in but we needed to match it. It really was a big production and it was the first time that we went with Screen Actors Guild actors, so their wage demands and working demands shot the budget way up. And there were a lot of people to feed. And we had to pay for the use of the mall...

Dario made it clear right away, he said, "Look, I won't touch your version; you make the film you want to make. But I need to be able to change it for non-English-language European audiences."

JB: He did his own edit for Europe...

GR: Yeah, but he was very up front about it. And I loved his stuff too, so I said, "Sure." So that's the deal we made. The band Goblin too, he said, "You can use this, don't use it or use some of it." I wound up using some of it.

JB: I like the contrast of music. Is the other music in the film library music?

GR: Library, yeah. Dario's personality is more like "Rah!", whereas I'm like, "Hey!" [laughs]. I think that is reflected in that score. He takes it so seriously, everything has got to be serious. He



Land of the Dead

cut all the humour out of the original version and we had trouble with censors in the UK. They wanted to cut two-and-a-half to three minutes out of his version. But when they saw the US version they got a lot more lenient because the humour takes the edge off some of the gore.

JB: *Dawn of the Dead* had an immediate knock-on effect. Suddenly there were these Italian zombie films coming out from the likes of Lucio Fulci, and also in America later on there were *The Return of the Living Dead* films. How did you feel about this unofficial response?

GR: I don't know. I found it sort of funny and typical. If anybody hits a home run with anything there are going to be ten or more imitations.

JB: Did *Dawn's* success open doorways to bigger budgets? Did studios come knocking?

GR: Studios have always knocked [laughs], but I've never seen a script through my agent that I'd want to spend my time on. And I was always able to generate my own stuff. I just never saw the need. I did two films for Orion, *The Dark Half* [1991] and *Monkey Shines* [1988]; *Creepshow* wound up being distributed by Warners, but they bought it from United Film, the guys who initially distributed



Creepshow: 'My only number one movie!'



Diary of the Dead

Dawn in the US. United gave us a three-picture deal after *Dawn* and that was *Knightriders*, *Creepshow* and *Day of the Dead* [1985]. And they gave us *carte blanche* to make the films we wanted. We had creative control and that's why those films have the kind of energy that they have. But Warner Bros picked up *Creepshow* at Cannes.

JB: *Creepshow* was quite a commercial success...

GR: It was. My only number one movie! Number one on the *Variety* charts. The only time that's ever happened.

JB: And it was a collaboration with Stephen King. You had a few other collaborations. King gives a great cameo performance in *Knightriders*. And I believe you had a few other things in the pipeline.

GR: We had a great time working together. He wrote the stories for *Creepshow II* [1987]. I wrote the screenplay and it was directed by Michael Gornick. And then we worked together on the screenplay for *Pet Sematary* [1989] but I got tied up doing the goddamn re-shoots for *Monkey Shines*, and they had to start shooting, so they went with Mary Lambert [as director]. I also worked with Stephen closely on *The Stand*, when it was a screenplay. Originally we wanted to do it for film because Stephen thought he'd have to water it down too much for TV. But then all those deals all blew apart and I did *Dark Half*. I went to Orion for that because they had just distributed *Monkey Shines*. I wrote the screenplay for *Monkey Shines*, which was adapted from a novel. But they blew it. They were the worst – a terrible studio. They made all the wrong decisions. They kept films they should have thrown in the garbage and they hated films that made a lot of money. They didn't like *Dances with Wolves*... They didn't like *The Silence of the Lambs*. They thought it was "garbage". And that's a quote!

JB: If we could just talk about *Day of the Dead*. That was scaled back from how you had originally envisaged it. You settled for a lower budget so you could put in more gore. Gore tends to be used in exploitation films for commercial ends, but you're potentially making your film less commercially viable by having that level of splatter...

GR: In that sense, yeah. I mean today – give me a break. [AMC series] *The Walking Dead* is damn near as bloody as *Day*. Well, maybe not quite!

JB: *Day* is pretty full on.

GR: Yeah, *Day* is pretty rough [laughs].

JB: Where did it come from? That desire to have so much gore, even if it meant your film might not reach as many people as it would without it?

GR: I thought that I needed it. It may have been misguided but I felt that it was a slap in the face. It was a reminder... Like, "Hey, maybe take this a bit more seriously." And I was thinking consciously of Altman's *MASH*. You know where you're laughing your ass off for 90 minutes, and then you go into the operating theatre and this gore hits you so hard. I was hoping for that kind of an effect. I'm not trying to be extreme with it. Also it's a bit of a signature.

JB: Tom Savini's effects are spectacularly good as well. Especially by the time you get to *Day of the Dead*.

GR: Oh yeah. He's really hit his stride with *Day*.

JB: *Day* is a very bleak film – all these people in this underground space not getting on. It's about the complete breakdown of communication...

GR: That was the whole thing. It's like a pressure cooker – literally, with a lid on it. That was the intention. The idea that the army might have potentially caused the phenomenon, that lingers too. I mean, we don't know. It could be voodoo, or God's punishment... I never wanted it to be a returning satellite [laughs]. The story about that is, we had a couple of other explanations in the original film [*Night of the Living Dead*] and we just cut them because the distributor wanted the film to run no longer than 90 minutes. We needed to cut six minutes, so we cut out news casts because there were enough of those. And that's where the other explanations were offered. I felt the one scene in Washington, with the army and the scientists talking was enough. It's left uncertain; one guy keeps saying, "We're not sure about that." But everyone interprets the film as a returning Venus probe causing the dead to come back to life.

JB: Since *Land of the Dead*, you've gone back to smaller productions...

GR: Yeah, I was happy to get back to the roots. I had problems with *Land*. I loved Dennis [Hopper] but I was very uncomfortable to see that one of the biggest line-items on the budget was his expensive cigars [laughs]. The catering... everything goes up when you have Simon Baker, John Leguizamo... when you have these stars.

JB: You've never really used stars...

GR: No, I think the anonymity helps, because you never know what's going to happen to whom. But working on a smaller scale means more creative freedom. The same company financed *Diary of the Dead* [2007] and *Survival of the Dead* [2009] and they gave us final cut, so it was really back to the old days.

JB: And is that more enjoyable than working on a big scale?

GR: Much more. You don't have to write a

'Now you can't sell a zombie film unless you promise to spend a lot of money. I think it belongs on a smaller, more intimate scale'

memo... [On a large production] if you see a sunset and you'd like to shoot it, you've got to email first to get permission...

JB: *Diary* has some of your purest horror sequences. You adopted a quasi-realist, camcorder style. Did you want to do something a bit more set-piece based?

GR: Yeah, basically. It was hard to do that. We never really achieved it. I mean, if you could see the editing sessions... I wanted it to be absolutely pure, with no visible cuts. But I wound up in some sequences having two cameras running so the cuts were sort of explained, and I put in this device that she, [the lead character] Debra, is editing the footage that the guy originally shot. We had to do that because we just couldn't pull it off in single takes... We wound up having to do that, but it gave us the opportunity to put in all the news footage and the Getty images and all the other stuff that really adds to the film. It's about citizen journalism...

JB: Zombies have surged in popularity again: the *Dawn of the Dead* remake and *The Walking Dead*. How do you feel about where it is now?

GR: Well, it's just got terribly crowded, hasn't it? Now you can't sell a zombie film unless you promise to spend a lot of money. I think it belongs on a smaller, more intimate scale. I certainly don't think you need *World War Z* at all. I know Max Brooks, who wrote the book, didn't like it at all. I didn't like it when I first saw it.

JB: Do you feel a degree of ownership?

Do you care about how zombies are used in popular culture?

GR: I don't think so. I just used to be the only guy and it was my little private cache. I could bring the zombies out whenever I wanted to and do something with them that maybe had something to say. And then all of a sudden it just became another creature. And basically it's a first-person shooter now... I think the popularity came from video games, not from films because up until *Zombieland* [2009] there was no film that grossed more than 100 million bucks. The remake of *Dawn* did \$75 million. Hollywood isn't going to be particularly interested at that level. And then all of a sudden, I think it was Brad Pitt who went after *Z*, and he somehow convinced the studio to spend an exorbitant amount – unnecessarily.

JB: And the zombies aren't loaded with the same sort of political meaning.

GR: Nothing. I mean I don't see anything. It's a disaster movie. They were even carefully avoiding the word. You had to extrapolate it from *Z*. People who didn't know the book might figure *World War Z* means the final world war. They've finally got to the letter *Z*! Even in the advertising, they never used the word zombies; they never showed a shot that looked like zombies. They look like army ants, you know?

JB: Are you keen to keep up to date and watch a new zombie film if there is a big one out?

GR: No... I sort of had to watch that one.

They invited me to watch it. They wanted me to say something nice, I think [laughs].

JB: Lastly, I'd like to go back to *Knightriders*, as it's an overlooked film. It's quite uncommercial in some ways: 140 minutes is long for a genre film...

GR: Yeah, it is, but luckily the distributor loved it. He didn't know how to distribute it, but this guy Salah Hassanein, he was just like one of the old-school moguls. He was the guy who originally distributed *Dawn* and gave us this three-picture deal. He was a flamboyant Egyptian guy, a great guy and he loved the movie, but he didn't have the power or the money to distribute it effectively.

JB: Did it receive a limited release then?

GR: Oh yeah. And also, whenever a Romero movie comes out people want it to be *Dawn of the Dead* you know? Even *Day of the Dead*, the reception was very cool initially.

JB: I watched the original Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel review of *Day*. They're so down on it. Nowadays, that's a film cherished by so many people...

GR: I know. It's too bad they don't show up when it matters. Unfortunately, it takes a while. In fact, on this trip, just yesterday, I met the first journalist I've ever met who said, "*Survival of the Dead* is my favourite of all six." Finally someone has come around to liking *Survival of the Dead*. And I think that'll probably keep happening, like with *Day of the Dead*... I've tried to make the zombie films different from each other. I was hoping there would be another one. I wanted to do a *noir*, black and white. But it was not to be because *Survival* just tanked. *Day of the Dead* remains my favourite zombie film of mine. So much of it is again in the process – remembering everyone being there to make that film, everyone there to work with one purpose. And no bad apples – a wonderful time was had by all. And we are all still friends. Good memories. ☺

i **Creepshow** is out now on Blu-ray and is reviewed on page 96



Knightriders



The Crazies



Martin

Postgraduate opportunity

thinking through film

The University of Edinburgh offers postgraduate study in film from philosophical, theoretical and national perspectives while also offering a unique Masters programme in exhibiting and curating film.

The **MSc in Film Studies** allows you to explore crucial concepts in the development of film theory and film-philosophy with an emphasis on European and American auteur cinema. We put serious film criticism, analysis and interpretation at the centre of our degree as well as focusing on film aesthetics, national cinemas and film adaptation.

The **MSc in Film, Exhibition and Curation** is an innovative programme which combines rigorous critical study of cinema with applied project work on film programming, film festivals and curation. With contributors including leading curators, filmmakers and writers this programme will give you the knowledge and professional skills you need for a career in film exhibition, curation, education or research.

We welcome proposals for the three-year **PhD in Film Studies**.

www.llc.ed.ac.uk/film-studies



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
School of Literatures,
Languages & Cultures

The University of Edinburgh is a charitable body, registered in Scotland, with registration number SC005336.



The essential guide to Gothic Film

Explore the shadowy world of Gothic cinema and television through a range of lavishly illustrated new essays, written by some of the world's foremost authorities in the field.

Available from bfi.org.uk/shop
and amazon.co.uk



PROFILE

THE MUSIC OF LIGHT

For more than 40 years, Brazil's Júlio Bressane has been harmonising a huge range of sources into a unique cinema of the subconscious

By Aaron Cutler

"I was a victim of the myth of cinema," Júlio Bressane says. "Cinema is a radical instrument of something impossible, which is self-transformation. This is impossible. You don't transform. But this illusion of self-transformation is perhaps what first brought me to film."

The 67-year-old Brazilian filmmaker was speaking a few months before his latest work, *Sentimental Education* (2013), received its world premiere at Locarno. His 35mm feature creates illusions through the figure of Aurea (Josie Antello), a middle-aged woman in Rio de Janeiro who spots a beautiful young man (Bernardo Marinho) bathing in a rooftop pool. He tells her his name is Aureo, and they share long verdant walks and afternoon teas as she tells him about the novels and poems she has never published, her memories of her long-vanished parents and her academic studies into the history of eroticism and the travels of the human heart. He watches wide-eyed as she pleurably rolls words off

her tongue, sharing her life with her younger double before their time together runs out.

Though Bressane admires Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (1869), which also narrates a romance between a young man and an older woman, his film holds only superficial connections to it. Inspiration comes more directly from the Greek myth of Endymion, a shepherd whom the moon goddess Selene froze into immortality and whose story Aurea recounts as a lesson to her prodigy about the value of preserving the past. She comes to play a goddess herself. The young man disappears from the middle section of the film, which presents Aurea performing a serpentine dance, sometimes with the moon beside her.

These motions, like Aurea's monologues to her beloved, are demonstrations of love. The translations from one set of gestures to another are part of Bressane's career-long play with film's ability to shift its form. He admires cinema for what he calls its ability to be a "crossing" that passes through all other artistic disciplines, absorbing pieces of literature, theatre, painting, music, dance and nature as it moves along. Bressane thinks that it does so in a trancelike state, working upon the viewer's unconscious so that the external appearance of transformation becomes internal,

translating into the illusion of inner change.

He sees his 40-plus films (many of which have been rarely screened either within Brazil or abroad) as adaptations and translations, though not necessarily of single texts. More often, a Bressane film sculpts the surrounding world to fit the topic at hand, using a historical figure or preexisting fictional tale as a starting point. *Sermons: The Story of Antônio Vieira* (1989) moves between the famed Jesuit philosopher (Othon Bastos) delivering speeches and contemporary Brazilian artists giving performances in 17th-century garb; in *The Mandarin* (1995), a film biography of the samba musician Mário Reis, modern Brazilian singers such as Gal Costa and Gilberto Gil perform as artists from earlier generations while also playing themselves. Even when a film has a clearly traceable source (such as 1985's *Brás Cubas* and 2008's *The Herb of the Rat*, both adaptations of works by Brazilian novelist Machado de Assis), it feels as though a hand has torn out the book's pages to rewrite them to

Bressane sees his films as adaptations, though not of single texts. They sculpt the world to fit the topic at hand



Júlio Bressane: 'All cinema, not just mine, can be reduced to one single film'

include local celebrities, soundtracks from Welles films, fresh flowers in vases and new observations on sex and death, all of which seem like fragments summoned from the artist's inner life.

"It is pathology that engenders an artist's style," says Bressane. His pathology was a feeling of distance from his peers that led to an engagement with his surroundings always mediated through reading. He devoured literature as a child, then expanded to include cinema at the age of 11, when his mother gave him a 16mm camera (a process he later poetically recreated in his 1977 film *Miramar*). Bressane never went to university, but instead became an assistant director to Cinema Novo filmmakers Walter Lima, Jr, and Glauber Rocha before making his debut feature, *Face to Face* (1967), which alternates between a young man and young woman (Antero de Oliveira and Helena Ignez) whose families will not allow them to be together. Much of *Face to Face* consists of flowing, black-and-white, handheld views of the two people, each walking down a street alone, lost in thought.

In contrast to Cinema Novo's focus on exposing social problems, *Face to Face* pursues the mysteries and secrets of human psychology, courting the oblique and implicit and as such far more open to viewer interpretation. Bressane did not see himself as part of Cinema Novo's fundamentally narrative movement, but rather stood apart as an experimental filmmaker. His subsequent films, *The Angel Was Born* and *Killed the Family and Went to the Movies* (both finished in 1969 after being filmed simultaneously over 15 days), confirmed this. The first is a loose string of episodes involving a pair of thieves abducting bourgeois folk that leads from musical sequences to extended murders followed by a musical getaway; the second commences with a series of close-ups of smiling young women who pave the way first for a young man to commit the title acts and then for him to plunge into a theatre's fantasy world.

These films have often been read as aesthetic attacks on Brazil's then ruling military dictatorship, and work as such, but they also pass wonderfully as comedies about the pleasures of indulging in one's dream life. Bressane came to seem both a founder and a follower of traditions: a key member of a budding Brazilian avant-garde movement called Cinema Marginal in a country that had not produced experimental cinema since Mário Peixoto's *Limite* (1931), and a natural heir to early French filmmaker-theorists exploring the unconscious powers of film, such as Abel Gance, a phrase of whose Bressane has long held as a mantra: "Cinema is the music of light."

The metaphor works for Bressane's films, which often link silent sequences with music and whose entire structures are flowingly musical in nature. Their scenes of characters talking and dancing move not through concrete events, but rather subliminally from tone to tone, with shifts marked by gestures as arbitrary as the film crew setting up on camera for the filmmaker to call "roll" and "cut"; in *Sentimental Education*, boom mics and key lights roam on screen with minds of their own, setting the scenes for the lovers like musicians preparing a show. Bressane says that such images, typically removed from films, are as relevant



The Angel Was Born

and compelling as a film's normal contents. They all form part of what he calls the greater "passage" of cinema, whose central actions consist of shifts within a large, continuous wave. "Each film is individual but together they unite into one," he says. "All cinema, not just mine, can be reduced to one single film."

Accordingly, the arc of Bressane's filmography resists a clean development line. Though his later films often feel gentler than the chaotic early works, the path between them appears coherent. Bressane has worked in the same modest, essentially self-sufficient way for decades following the death or retirement of many Cinema Marginal colleagues. He has done so for more than 40 years in the company of his wife and frequent collaborator, the psychology professor Rosa Dias, and has spent much of that time in the same house (shown in his 2012 documentary *Rua Aperana* 52) at the same work table. Films will often brew in his head for years until he shoots and edits them within a few weeks.

Throughout, the works have expressed his desire to give "a personal expression of a



Sentimental Education

general sensation": the development of Brazilian identity. The major philosophical concept that he believes to be native to Brazil is that of anthropophagy, set out in 1928 by the writer Oswald de Andrade as a kind of cannibalism in which one culture swallows up others. Bressane, who despite having lived abroad in the 1970s still only speaks Portuguese ("I am a monoglot"), has made films with Brazilian actors playing foreign historical figures including St Jerome, Nietzsche and Cleopatra in the language, partly in order to see, hear, and trace their impact on his native culture. More broadly, he has shown the continuing formation of the entity of Brazil through mixtures of indigenous peoples with foreigners. *The Caraiá Monster – New Ancient History of Brazil* (1975) presents a man-beast (played by Carlos Imperial) rising to life on an island and crying "Wake up, Brazil!" for all to hear; *Tabu* (1982) intercuts scenes of Andrade and companions frolicking on Rio beaches with Murnau's images of South Sea islanders greeting visitors, a metaphor for Brazil's birth.

In *Sentimental Education*, Aurea shares Brazilian culture with her protégé through tales of dead poets, dances to samba tunes and paintings of Indians. Murnau's *Tabu* appears as images on a piece of celluloid that she waves seductively while dancing. "A movie, a film," she says with delight, and then holds the relic of her old film club up to the camera, with all else falling out of focus for the viewer to watch a vertical line of dusty still frames. Celluloid is seen, like Aurea, as a product of an older, more physical time.

Bressane once said on screen (in his short 1977 documentary *Chinese Viola*), "All that I've done in cinema has been to enjoy myself, to feel and to give pleasure." In this vein, *Sentimental Education* rhymes with his earlier *A Love Film* (2003), a blissful parade of choreographed love scenes starring Josie Antello that turns sex and cinema into reflecting sensual experiences. Yet at the same time, the images of roving film equipment in *Sentimental Education* feel more bittersweet than they have in the past, as though cinema's abilities to feel and be felt were on the move. Indeed, after the film was printed on 35mm, the director of Labo Cine do Brasil sent Bressane a congratulatory letter: his was the last celluloid work that the lab would process.

Bressane sees digital as a valid form of filmmaking, and has even made full-length digital works. At the same time, he believes that "a passageway from transparency to opacity" is occurring through the shift from celluloid to digital, and that the complexities of digital filmmaking's music have yet to be properly heard. Aurea and Aureo's glide towards immortality concludes with an epilogue, 'Circuncena', in which the film's actors and crew spring to life in a series of quickly passing outtakes from the shoot, transforming the previous fictional scenes into an informal making-of. One might view *Sentimental Education* as a brief, eternal encounter between mirrored eras, but Bressane shuns any discussion of what the film means. "No, no," he says. "I keep filming." 📽

i Thanks to Gustavo Beck, Filipe Furtado, Bruno Safadi and Giovanni Vimercati for research help

SKATING ON THIN ICE

Emily Wardill's films combine disparate, playful and bizarre imagery with a distinctly queasy emotional undertow

By Charlie Fox

"Some things make sense and some things don't." That was, according to Emily Wardill, the crucial illumination that art gave her: a way of telling the illogical and intelligible apart. But Wardill's films are those rare works in which nothing is immediately comprehensible. They cavort in the cemetery of the obvious. These are conundrums, lessons in disorientation, pieces of sinister mischief that keep you awake all night. Watching them is exhilarating, frightening and strange, like ice skating in the dark. Hers is a breathlessly inventive kind of cinema in which things uproariously stop making sense. Their own obvious and yet unfathomable illumination might be how difficult it is to make sense of things.

In these films, it's perfectly possible to come across a spaced-out teenage beauty gazing glumly around a banquet – adolescent girls are the only figures that appear in them consistently – or a jittery doctor telling you: "Turn out the lights and you fall down in a shapeless bundle!" The stretches of blank and black leader that checker some of them feel reminiscent of the empty spaces in a fiendish crossword puzzle. Slowly, the inklings of something coiled inside these films began to take hold. Wardill smuggles a disconcerting undercurrent into a scene that has the airy, mischievous feel of a cartoon hallucination. For ten minutes or so, *Sick Serena and Dregs and Wreck and Wreck* (2007) looks and sounds like a transcription of the mind in all its cubistic noisiness, full of psychosis, smut, daydreams, moonlight and dead ends. Many of her films use this frolicsome, attractive surface – but make no mistake, these are experimental operations of the fiercest kind. Tigerish menace moves through every frame, hidden amid the dirty jokes and conceptual skylarking.

Wardill has made 12 films in the last eight years. Some are very short, akin to someone reading you a riddle then vanishing, others are longer and relax into their strange flight across an hour or so. Fascinating elements will be carefully interleaved, including parapsychology, performance art, mental illness, costumes (most of her characters look as if they've stepped out of a punk fairy tale, all jazz-cat brothel creepers and ink-blue fur) and Victorian ghost stories. While so many of her contemporaries assume the becalmed gaze of the archivist or follow Chris Marker's spectre-like stray cats, here's work that feels riotously ambitious and vivid. *Born Winged Animals and Honey Gatherers of the Soul* (2005) is a structuralist reverie that hazily arranges fleeting images of mid-afternoon life in East London to 12 distorted bell tolls, slyly translating some wild-eyed lines by Nietzsche on to film. Each film feels bewildering and singular yet all of them emerge from Wardill's obsession with "the irreducible strangeness of images", which is precisely what her work presents to you again and again.



A decadent carnival: *Sick Serena and Dregs and Wreck and Wreck*

Secs (2007) is four minutes of concentrated disquiet. You see a silhouette and hear a distorted, creepily androgynous voice. At once, you're lured into recognition of a TV format and mistake it for a scene from a true-crime programme, those shows with their traumatised, shadowy casts that wish to remain anonymous. But the figure's speech is amiss. She describes the mundane particularities of her life; how she caught an illness from lying too long in cold bathwater and lost her job owing to a lack of concentration caused by her clandestine research into certain artefacts. "Now I can concentrate on metal detecting," she says, her voice slowed to a druggy treacle. Like a stray sketch from Chris Morris's *Jam* (2000), *Secs* has bad-dream atmospherics and a gift for perverting low-grade documentary into a scene of unnamable oddness and narcotic strength.

Sick Serena and Dregs and Wreck and Wreck is a decadent carnival of a film, a shambolic essay on stained-glass windows that transforms into

These films are conundrums, lessons in disorientation, pieces of sinister mischief that keep you awake at night

a psychedelic episode of counterfeit history reminiscent of late Fellini. The inhabitants of certain hallowed panes come to life as trashy hallucinations. A hermit reading scripture is conjured as a cross between the Erl-King of German folklore, his fiery red beard thick as winter fog, and a scuzzy tramp with a bellyful of White Lightning lazing around in ragged sportswear. An angelic boy appears, clutching a flickering candle, his hair flecked with gold. There are successive shots of stained-glass windows, slipping past in Technicolor flashes like magic lantern slides, and a gorgeous line of hallucinogenic critique from John Ruskin recited in kingly voice: "The rainbow is painted on a



Born Winged Animals and Honey Gatherers...



Full Firearms

shower of melted glass." Two blonde nymphs appear, one numbly echoing the other's lines. An old and ferocious text is read aloud as if emerging through the s-l-o-w crawl of an autocue: "Dash out my teeth with an axe." (Speech disorders are a routine affliction in Wardill's work: words are stammered, mangled, droned and repeated into meaninglessness.) All this unfolds in a sprawling studio full of flimsy props, cascades of colourful light supplying a lurid disco heat and energy, as if it was a nightclub during the Black Death. Possibly something is being re-enacted according to rules you didn't hear: everyone's steps are crooked but unmistakably ceremonial. The rhythm is strange, switching from deep lulls to spiky *non sequiturs* and arranged according to some impenetrable logic. Critical rumours about the film's meaning abound but none catch the rare weirdness of its atmosphere or its anarchic shape.

Ben (2007) is much chillier, more withdrawn. Ghouls wander around a studio that's spookily white, almost blue, like a gloomy snowscape. Though shot in colour, the film's set is painted black and white, a perceptual trick that yields a woozy glow. Some characters are in blackface, others adrift like depressed angels. A (found? invented?) psychoanalytic case study of 'Ben from Arkansas' is read out in a faltering voice ("alco-all-ism") by a teenage girl. The correspondence between sound and image is oblique. An unnerving sense of spacey calm surrounds the phantasmic scene, as if it was an interlude in an expressionist horror show. The film is ten minutes long but time feels stretched, opiated. Anxiety is a common response.

Wardill's finest work is probably *Full Fireworks* (2011), a slow, staggering film, a languid beach dream. Imelda, a lady of uncertain age, inherits a fortune from her father, a weapons manufacturer. She consults with an architect and work begins on a house for the ghosts of those killed by his artillery. The house is built on the grey seashore and soon inhabited by an assortment of drifters and children, whom Imelda believes to be the ghosts. They rehearse a play that remains inscrutable and seems a little demented, like Rivette gone mad on the English coast. The skeleton of the house becomes "this rickety set" for all sorts of games between its occupants. Imelda and their ringleader waltz on the roof while the gramophone plays a creaky serenade. A honeyed haze suffuses certain scenes, light shimmering as if glimpsed through half-awake eyes. Rarely has a beach looked so sad. The film becomes a touching, mournful, misty thing, a work that doesn't merely invoke ghosts but wanders with them, even risks becoming stranded in their world.

The architect talks about labyrinths and their "deliberately disorientating design" when mapping out the structure of the house. Maybe Wardill is suggesting her work as a kind of labyrinth within those lines, one map concealed within another. But even a labyrinth, looked at a certain way, can be smoothly understood. Wardill's films remain intoxicating and mysterious: they never unravel like that. You have to keep the whole puzzle in your head, like a sleuth lost in the funhouse. ☹

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

Chaplin's Tramp remains film's most universal icon a century after his not entirely auspicious screen debut



By David Robinson

Long after their heyday, Chaplin's Tramp and Mickey Mouse remain the cinema's universal icons. This year, the Tramp – the more human embodiment of the two – achieves his centenary.

The precise date to commemorate is hard to fix. Was it the rainy afternoon in January 1914 when Chaplin emerged from the Keystone wardrobe hut wearing a comedy costume he had just assembled on the principle of contrasts – tiny hat and enormous boots; pinched jacket and voluminous pants, a toothbrush moustache and a swagger cane that spoke of forlorn social aspiration? Or was it the week of 5 January, when he first worked in the costume, playing an inebriate lounge lizard in *Mabel's Strange Predicament*? Or 7 February, when the character was first seen on screen in a six-minute improvisation, *Kid Auto Races at Venice*, shot at a Saturday afternoon novelty sports event and released before the previously shot film?

Perhaps the Tramp's true public debut came four weeks earlier, on the day this film was actually shot, 10 January 1914. For, as well as being a comedy (although not a particularly hilarious one), *Kid Auto Races* is a documentary record of the first audience ever to witness the Tramp. The Keystone Company took any opportunity to use a local public event as the setting for a comedy, sending along a skeleton crew of technicians and clowns. On this occasion it was Chaplin, their latest recruit, with director Henry Lehrman (already at odds with Chaplin) and cameraman Frank D. Williams. The film has only 20 shots and a single gag: the Tramp forever gets in the way of the camera crew, who are trying to film the kids in their soap-box racing cars.

The public, by and large, prove supremely indifferent to the debut of a great clown. As Californians, they are clearly quite unimpressed by the presence of a movie camera. Even when the Tramp is assaulted by Lehrman and makes dramatic falls, their attention is only fleetingly distracted from the race. Generally, they are more embarrassed than amused by the fracas. A little girl in the grandstand shows her irritation at having to peer around the foolish fellow standing in front of her. A race steward actually joins the film crew in assaulting the intruder. No one seems surprised by Chaplin's ill-fitting get-up. But after a while – the film seems to be assembled in fairly chronological order – a few more of the crowd, predominantly teenage boys, recognise the show for what it is and laugh unrestrainedly. The Tramp has his audience.

The first audience ever to witness the Tramp by and large prove supremely indifferent to the debut of a great clown



Supertramp: Chaplin's timeless creation

Still, there is practically nothing in this obstreperous, even objectionable little tyke to anticipate all that was to come: the kiss of *The Kid*; the final shots of *City Lights* and *Monsieur Verdoux* (in his final moments, evoking the Tramp again); the Tramp-barber who switches places with the Great Dictator to address the world. Yet in one respect we do perceive the future, as the Tramp obstinately takes over the camera, always looking into the lens to engage us, the screen audience that will be. Within weeks, Chaplin was to master the medium and begin to discover his own supreme expressiveness – both physical and emotional – within it.

A universal icon – yet the image was far from consistent over the years. Even between *Mabel's Strange Predicament* and *Kid Auto Races* he had changed his hat. After these two films, the pants were to become spectacularly more voluminous and the boots more aggressive. Over two decades the tie changed constantly: long, bow, striped, spotted, dark, light and finally absent. The waistcoat varied in pattern and cut, and the Victoria and Albert Museum's 2012 exhibition of Hollywood Costume brought the surprise that the *Modern Times* suit was grey. Chaplin was always contemptuous of pedantic continuity: "If they notice things like that it means they are not looking at me." He was, as usual, right. The Tramp survives as a spirit, not a costume. "Those big shoes", wrote Gene Morgan, an early critic, "are buttoned with 50,000,000 eyes." ☹

THE VIEW FROM THE BOTTOM RUNG

Political agitation and impressively understated performances were to the fore at this year's Seville European Film Festival

By Michael Pattison

In November, David Cameron called for permanent austerity during a speech for the Lord Mayor of London. His words magnified the already potent politics of a number of films that screened over the following days at the tenth Seville European Film Festival (SEFF). As I noted during a panel discussion at the festival, we are now half a decade in to the slowdown that resulted from the financial crisis and, though many filmmakers still seem overwhelmed by such events, there are signs that some are finally getting to grips with the hostilities we face.

Perhaps not by coincidence, the films that confronted the current socioeconomic predicament most directly at SEFF were predominantly Spanish. Several of these screened as part of *Resistencias*, a new and aptly-named programming strand with which José Luis Cienfuegos – now in his second year as festival director – hopes to consolidate SEFF's position as an essential event for more politically engaged filmmakers. *Resistencias* contained enough strong works this year to suggest future expansion would be worthwhile, especially given the growing need to fortify the notion of film as an artistic endeavour against Europe's intransigently unsympathetic governments.

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's state-of-the-nation address earlier this year anticipated Cameron's recent speech. Frequently overheard on car radios in Chilean-born Cristóbal Artega Rozas's *The Sad Smell of Flesh* (*El triste olor de la carne*), Rajoy's voice anchors that film's events to a recognisably fraught Spain. Shot in a single take, Rozas's second feature follows Alfredo (Alfredo Rodríguez), a bankrupt businessman who must navigate a network of banal transactions in an effort to conceal his property from unforgiving liquidators, with whom a forthcoming appointment looms desperately large.

Above all else, the film is a technical marvel. Its choreography is remarkable, as Rodríguez meanders around otherwise public spaces interacting with pre-placed fellow performers. The sustained concentration upon the actor's gaunt features, which speak of a dormant resignation that threatens to consume him at any moment, lends the film a suitably gruelling edge. For a work that constantly draws attention to its own design, though, *Sad Smell* is also surprisingly and deliberately low-key – even anticlimactic – as if to suggest that in a prolonged and pervasive economic downturn, the human cost is felt with a devastatingly unvoiced whimper.

Also part of the *Resistencias* programme was *A Bouquet of Cactus* (*Un ramo de cactus*), the ninth feature by writer-director Pablo Llorca. Opening with the graphic image of a child's birth, this otherwise gentle comedy centres on Alfonso, a middle-aged man who balances obligations to a collective agricultural farm, his younger girlfriend and his grandson. Alfonso



The road home: Fran Araújo and Ernesto de Nova's *El rayo*

has a palpable distaste for his interfering older brother's conservative outlook – all the more so for having been informed long ago by his once revolutionary views – and so takes it upon himself to protect his grandson from prevailing social currents, including the pursuit of happiness through monetary gain.

On this evidence, Llorca has been wrongfully overlooked outside Spain. Despite technical shortcomings (uneven sound levels, incongruous cutaways, mismatched eye-line edits), this is an easygoing but deceptively sharp take on how social pressures impact upon domestic relationships. Add to this its casual and sometimes unusual narrative ellipses and *A Bouquet of Cactus* begins to compare in some ways to *Ozu*.

Incidentally, Llorca's film boasts one of the year's finest minimalist performances, by Pedro Casablanc, an actor with one of those great, impermeably deadpan faces. Without so much as a smile, the 50-year-old conveys fatigue, hurt and unconditional warmth, often all at once. In fact, Casablanc's subtly commanding screen presence might have been the unsung find of the festival – and SEFF wasn't short of competition, offering as it did Toni Servillo's turn in *The Great Beauty* and Lee Kang-sheng's in *Stray Dogs* (whose festival eligibility was based on its status as a French co-production).

Just as accomplished was Hassan Ben Oudra, the unassuming star of *El rayo*, which screened as part of a programme dedicated to new films

The new 'Resistencias' strand could help consolidate Seville's position as an essential event for politically engaged filmmakers

from Andalusia. Visibly documentarian in genesis, Fran Araújo and Ernesto de Nova's first feature is a simple and beautiful road movie that invites obvious comparisons to *The Straight Story* (1999), whose spiritualism it upends with a more grounded sensibility as it follows an itinerant labourer, unable to find work in Spain, making his way back to Morocco on his sole possession: a tractor.

Though its unsubtitled screening at SEFF meant that the specifics of its few dialogue-based encounters were lost on at least one critic in the room, the film's humour and warmth were tangible throughout; the amusing frissons that run through Hassan's three encounters with the Guardia Civil de Tráfico were especially unmistakable. Indeed, at a time when workers' plights are too often the stuff of aestheticised misery, *El Rayo* is refreshingly comical without sacrificing an acknowledgement of bleaker currents. And at the film's centre is Ben Oudra, an indefatigably upbeat chap whose thin face and wide smile speak at once of the harsh conditions and unflinching resistances to be found on Spain's bottom rungs. ☺

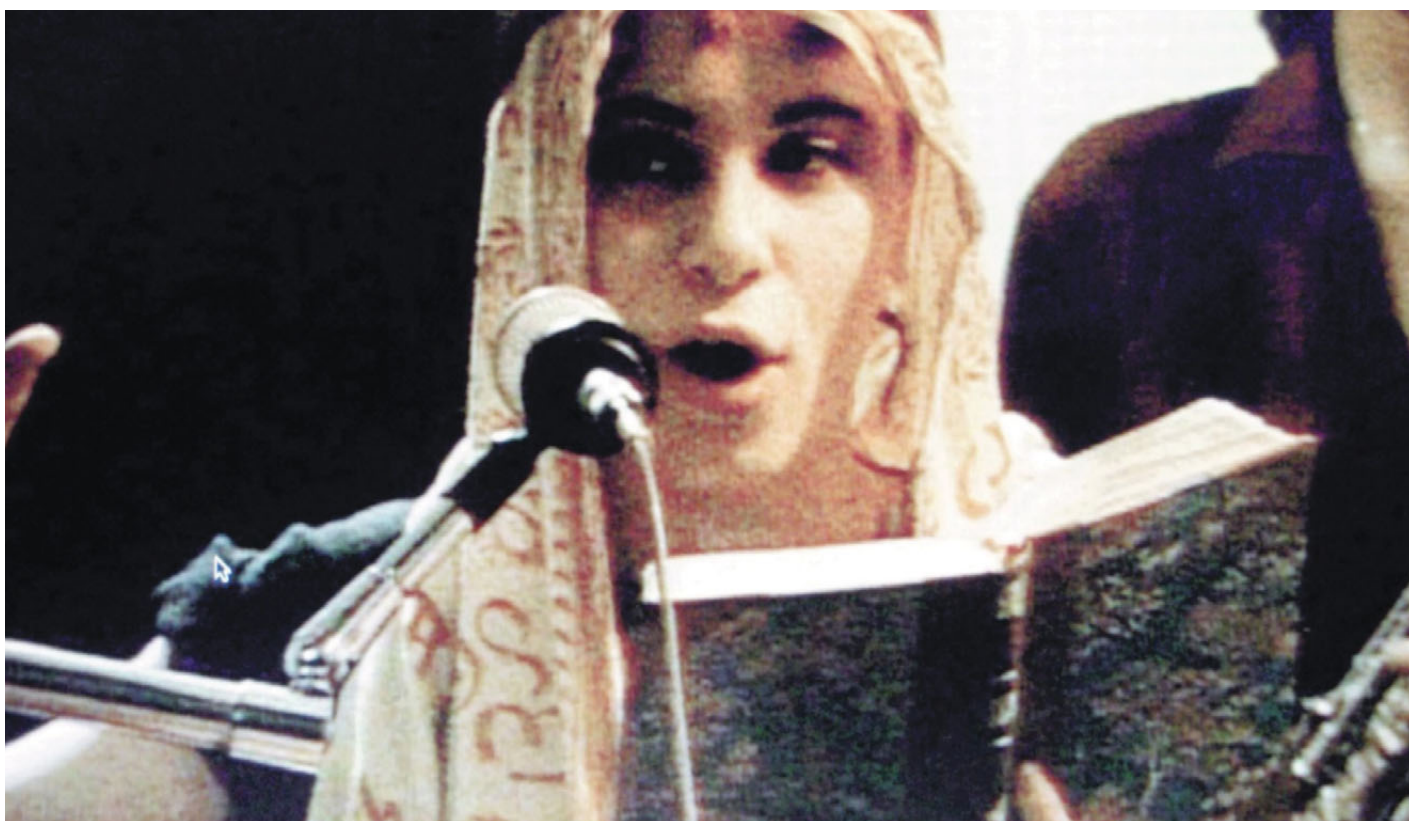


A Bouquet of Cactus



The Sad Smell of Flesh

TRAPPED AND FREE



Breaking through the walls of language: *Born in Flames*

Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* is noted for its post-punk music but its soundtrack's array of female voices is just as fascinating

By Frances Morgan

In Lizzie Borden's 1983 film *Born in Flames*, set in an imaginary era "ten years after the Social-Democratic War of Liberation", everything is breaking up, breaking down, blowing up and in flux. Its theme song, which recurs throughout the film, is in a regular, driving pop metre but something's amiss tonally that can't just be put down to the age of the film. Clanging, dreamy piano takes the usual place of a guitar; the bass is feverishly busy. The woman singing of "America's mysteries" is not an American; she has angular British vowels and sings at the edge of her range, aggressively unstable, both brittle and brutal. Twenty years later, Greil Marcus wrote of Lora Logic's performance, which is credited to the band The Red Crayola that she was briefly a member of, that she "sings not as if she's recording for a film but trapped in one... trapped because she has glimpsed a liberation".

That sense of being simultaneously trapped and free suffuses this awkward and urgent film. *Born in Flames* is set in a dystopian future that looks a lot like its real present – New York City in the early 1980s – and sounds like it too, for the most part. The fluid, jazz-inflected title song has a lightness and rootlessness that places it closer to Logic's London post-punk scene and the Art & Language collective of which Red Crayola's Mayo Thompson was a member, but the film's

other band, The Bloods, who appear on screen, are very much of their city. Led by Adele Bertei, the all-female group are garage rockers rather than experimentalists, more Patti Smith than, say, Mars. Elsewhere you hear snippets of soul, funk and reggae on the radio and in the street, including, ironically, Marcia Griffiths' 'Peaceful Woman'.

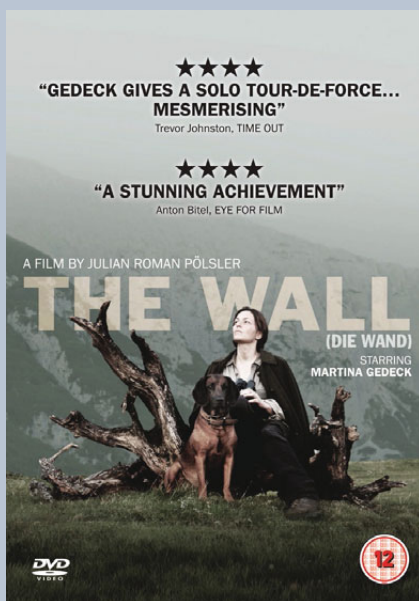
It's hugely enjoyable to trace the musical currents of *Born in Flames*'s soundtrack. Yet, watching it at the London Feminist Film Festival, I was equally interested in the sound and the substance of the dialogue. The script (a loose one) is fascinating, at once seductive and frustrating, spontaneous and knowing. It brings its characters together but also shows how deeply they are divided, along lines of race, class, vocabulary and expectation. Words are confusing and jumbled, improvised between the non-professional actors; then, they are highly formalised, declamatory, read out like manifestoes. It is suggested that we cannot trust them in and of themselves, that they can build and also destroy, but that it is worth holding the staff of a TV news station at gunpoint in order to broadcast them. At times, Borden subverts text with image, for example disrupting a dour political voiceover with flashing, contradictory words. In 1984, she said, "I wanted to create a situation where words, the walls of words used by everyone in the film, were broken through, into action, but not to make

At times, Borden subverts text with image, disrupting a dour political voiceover with flashing, contradictory words

a film that was anti-language." *Born in Flames* actually revels in language, not least because one of its narrative threads involves two radio stations, which become intertwined with the cause of the Women's Army. Radio Honey, run by African-American women and voiced by Honey (played by an actor of the same name, who Borden describes as having been "a singing evangelist"), broadcasts speeches based on those of Malcolm X, with a hypnotic flow: "For we are the children of the light, and we will continue to fight, not against the flesh and blood, but against the system that names itself falsely..." As Isabel, Adele Bertei runs Radio Ragazza and preaches punk-rock invective interspersed with oddly affecting, poetic lines in her tomboyish twang: "How does one illuminate a dark and muddy sky?" Against these vernacular voices, the earnest tones of the three journalists from the *Socialist Review* – smart white women in endless debate, criticising others' "gratuitous desire for revolution" – can only seem grating, as they are supposed to, especially against the straight-to-the-point, proverbial statements of elderly firebrand Zella Wylie (played by civil rights activist Florynce Kennedy).

"The 'dialogue' of the film is actually a dialectic," Karen Jaehne noted in *Film Quarterly* in 1984, "as the various groups offer representative views of their interest groups and thus reveal the reason for the splintering of the feminist movement." This belies the film's linguistic playfulness and humour. Thirty years on, the tensions of race, sexuality, gender and class that underpin *Born in Flames* remain contentious and urgent but now its charged, grainy harmony of women's voices seems equal in musicality to its impeccably cool soundtrack. 🎧

new wave *films* on DVD



The Wall Julian Roman Pölsler

An adaptation of the best-selling novel by the Austrian author Marlen Haushofer, the film stars Martina Gedeck who gives a solo performance of enormous strength, both mental and physical. A woman is cut off in the Alps alone but for a dog, a cow, a cat and her determination to survive, even when the rest of the world has possibly perished.

★★★★★
'This mesmerising, austere and contemplative film provides a rarified yet utterly immersive viewing experience'
Trevor Johnston
Time Out

★★★★★
'Manages to be at once a creepy sci-fi parable, a feminist Robinson Crusoe and a clear-eyed ode to the wonders of nature experienced in solitude'
Xan Brooks, The Guardian

'Riveting and emotionally involving from start to finish'
Jonathan Romney
Screen International

Available now on DVD and download

● Available in both the original German and a specially recorded English voice-over by Martina Gedeck



Winter of Discontent Ibrahim El Batout

This film, from one of Egypt's foremost directors, is set in and around the events of January 2011 in Cairo's Tahrir Square which led to the overthrow of the Mubarak regime. Three characters – an opposition activist played by Amr Waked, a TV journalist who so far has supported the status quo and a secret policeman – intersect before and during the events.

★★★★★
'There is a compressed and concentrated anger ... a remarkable formal technique and artistry in this movie, a fascinating insight into state oppression.'
Peter Bradshaw
The Guardian

'No other film about the Arab Spring is as apt as Ibrahim El Batout's. It lays bare the police state under Mubarak... Powerfully dramatic but never melodramatic.'
Derek Malcolm
The Evening Standard

Available on download now and on DVD 13 January

● Also includes interview with actors Amr Waked and Salah Al Hanafy

Order from amazon.co.uk

www.newwavefilms.co.uk

CURZON
FILM WORLD

NEW RELEASES

Artificial Eye



Le Week-End

Featuring scintillating performances from its award-winning cast (Jim Broadbent, Lindsay Duncan & Jeff Goldblum) this is a witty, honest and poignant drama especially for grown-ups.

Available on DVD, Blu-Ray & On Demand 10th February



Scatter My Ashes At Bergdorf's

Go behind the scenes at one of New York's most iconic addresses in this frank, revealing and insightful documentary portrait of modern American consumerism.

Available on DVD, Blu-Ray & On Demand 10th February



Mister John

A brooding, beguiling and Lynchian exploration of identity, desire and the lure of the exotic, 'Mister John' is a mesmerising drama from the award-winning directors of Helen.

Available on DVD, Blu-Ray & On Demand 24th February

PRE-ORDER NOW

amazon.co.uk

Free Super Saver Delivery and Unlimited One-Day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available on eligible orders. Terms and Conditions apply. See Amazon.co.uk for details.

Reviews



64 **American Hustle**

A gloriously juicy and well-played actors' movie, so besotted by its characters that David O. Russell eschews a set style to let the camera chase across the widescreen frames after the rowing, plotting, strutting trio at its heart



64 Films of the month



72 Films



94 Home Cinema



104 Books



House of games: Amy Adams and Christian Bale

American Hustle

Director: David O. Russell

Certificate 15 137m 51s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Don't say that you weren't warned. "Some of this actually happened", a title card winks at you, up front. It's a friendly tip-off that David O. Russell's gloriously assured, gleefully overstuffed and blackly comic take on the real-life 1970s FBI-goes-grifting Abscam operation against public corruption, will be trickier than a three-card monte. Everything is slippery in *American Hustle*, starting with the squabbling love triangle between goodhearted con artist Irving 'Irv' Rosenfeld (Christian Bale), his cautious mistress Sydney Prosser (Amy Adams) and Richie DiMaso (Bradley Cooper), the ambitious FBI agent blackmailing them into entrapping a handful of corrupt politicians using Irv's slickly produced fake-sheikh investment scam. While characters con each other (and themselves – Eric Warren Singer's crisp script is clear-eyed about the self-deception behind big dreams), the film is also flim-flamming us with brio. Nothing is straightforward, least of all the storytelling. A nervy Plaza suite opening scam screeches to a botched halt, reversing silkily into an extended how-we-met flashback

of romance and rooking suckers, whose narrated voiceover slips from Irv to Sydney (and eventually on to Richie) like a palmed card. But the film, like any charming bunko man, is splendidly and distractingly dressed in Carter-era finery, sporting chrome-yellow interiors, pool parties, boxy cars and giant collars – and the viewer is reduced to the role of hopeless patsy.

The 70s obsession that directors of Russell's generation display in *Boogie Nights*, *Blow* or *Almost Famous* is for a lost Shangri-La of sleaze, a decade when porn, cocaine or stadium rock could make or break a man. By contrast, Russell fills his undeniably glamorous grifting movie with a wackier, slyer nostalgia, one alert to the comic possibilities of Irv's histrionic wife Rosalyn deliberately exploding a newfangled microwave oven from sheer cussedness. Surprisingly, his customised vision of the period sometimes resembles a tougher, coked-and-Mobbed-up version of the stylised 30s adopted by con-artist films of the 70s such as *The Sting* and *Paper Moon*: a looser, chancier and infinitely more stylish era, in which decent rogues could prosper if they could turn the bad times and bad men to their own advantage.

Much of it is delivered via those narrative nuggets that R. Colin Tait neatly anatomised once in *Cinephile* as "That 70s Sequence" – showy summarising montages set in the 70s, fluid

with voiceovers, slick with slo-mo and cut to evocative tunes of the era. Russell is nifty at this, using the dry melancholy of Steely Dan's 'Dirty Work' to fuel a fledgling scam and finding unexpectedly operatic possibilities in ELO's '10358 Overture' and 'Long Black Road', which darken the mood nicely. Scorsese, who invented this type of potent snippet for *Goodfellas* and *Casino*, is the acknowledged master of the 70s snapshot. Russell borrows from him (and others) with a flagrant, exaggerated knowingness that elevates these tropes to new heights. When the film dives from a rowdy Scorsesean Italian-American dinner date for Irv and his mayoral 'mark' to Richie and Sydney strutting it at Studio 54 *Saturday Night Fever*-style, it



But is it art? Bradley Cooper (left) with Bale

suggests a filmmaker playing gleefully with borrowed identities, rather as his characters do.

This reinvention is the theme that links *American Hustle*'s striving scammers to *Silver Linings Playbook*'s made-over bipolar hero and *The Fighter*'s last-chance boxer, forming a loose but intriguing trilogy. Its characters are masquerading for gain, for freedom, but also for a chance at a new identity. Quick-witted Sydney transforms herself with Halston cast-offs from Irv's dry-cleaning store into 'Lady Edith Greensley' because her dream was to be "anyone else other than who I was". Dressing the part is paramount and putting the look together convincingly "from the feet up" is an art in itself. A bittersweet sequence cutting between Richie and Sydney in matching curlers while they flirt on the phone shows the film's eye for the telling backstage detail. Elaborate and deceptive hairstyling becomes a metaphor for the film's shiny, perpetually shaky con. Not for nothing is the opening scene Irv's painstaking construction of an impressive comb-over that resembles a complex crafting project. Similarly, Sydney's peekaboo *Cosmo Girl* wardrobe of sleek blouses and gowns slit to the waist or the thigh is a triumph of sartorial misdirection, seducing our gaze and those of her male marks away from the mechanics of the con.

Watching Irv angrily defend his stealthy 'small and sleek' *modus operandi* ("That's the art of becoming someone people can pin their beliefs and dreams on") against Richie's encroaching big ideas, he's every inch the outraged impresario. This is a film about performance in every sense, a gloriously juicy and well-played actors' movie, so besotted by its characters that the director eschews a set style to let the camera chase across the widescreen frames after the rowing, plotting, strutting trio at its heart. Cooper, delivering a coke-fuelled variation of that manic quality honed in *Silver Linings Playbook*, is impressive but he's outplayed here by Christian Bale's genial Irv, whose essential decency makes him the film's unexpected moral centre. Bale, famous for his radical physical transformations on screen, morphs seamlessly into a paunchy, middle-aged hustler. A less-is-more portrait of small, deft observations, far more skilful than *The Fighter*'s look-at-me Dicky, it's a quiet pleasure in an exhilaratingly noisy movie. But it's capped in its turn by Amy Adams's complex Sydney, flashing effortlessly from spooked to hard-headed, from bare-faced soulmate to glossy tease, giving the movie a much-needed emotional edge.

Dysfunctional, quarrelling cohorts have been the backbone of Russell's work since the fucked-up-family comedies *Spanking the Monkey* and *Flirting With Disaster*. Giddy with the explosive possibilities of a pinballing posse of richly textured characters, the film gradually goes long on the con artists and short on the con. While still hugely enjoyable, it becomes more of a saunter than a hustle, its middle section growing flabbier than Irv's, in a rollicking round of bonding, dining, flirting and shouting. No one shouts louder than Jennifer Lawrence's toxic Rosalyn, whose super-sized performance as Irv's wife and the scheme's loose cannon palls as rapidly as the hackneyed it's-the-sour-note-that-baits-the-sweet perfume theory that she personifies. If her eye-rolling scenes threaten the never-very-equal dramatic balance between the character relationships and the unfolding scam, her rash, flashy gambits nonetheless provide some pricklingly tense sequences in the last act.



Look into my eyes: Jennifer Lawrence holds court as loose cannon Rosalyn

Russell's customised vision of the 70s resembles the stylised 30s adopted by con-artist films of the real-life 70s, such as 'The Sting' and 'Paper Moon'

Such jeopardy, however, even if augmented by Robert de Niro's deadpan cameo as a Mafia boss fluent in Arabic, isn't enough to offset the absence of a truly clever capper for the con. The final reversal, though neat, plausible and pleasingly just once its unwrapped, is not bravura stuff. What it needs is a pay-off of the jaw-dropping quality of say, *The Sting*'s ingenious win-win, or the late, lurching realisations of *House of Games*. What it gets is simply good-enough.

A tendency to skim the surface of the drama, propelled by fine performances and Singer's energetic scripting, is *American Hustle*'s besetting flaw, then, though perhaps not a fatal one. Setting out to uncover shades of 70s greed and corruption, from FBI grandiosity to small-time swindlers via crooked congressman, it dances (albeit expertly) with its subjects rather than digging into them. Its raucous dinners and backslapping encounters, merciful Mafiosi and hilarious seductions are buoyant eye-catching elements that parade their levity as proudly as their retro trappings and aviator shades. Like the Abscam con, the film is a convincing confection, so well played that we don't care if it's the real deal or not. If it's not a masterwork, it's a classy copy, ranking with the luminous sham-Rembrandt that Irv praises above a legitimate one, because "the guy who made this was so good that it is *real* to everybody".

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Charles Roven
Richard Suckle
Megan Ellison
Jonathan Gordon
Written by
Eric Warren Singer
David O. Russell
Director of Photography
Linus Sandgren
Edited by
Jay Cassidy

Crispin Struthers
Alan Baumgarten
Production Designer
Judy Becker
Music
Danny Elfman
Sound Mixer
Tom Williams
Costume Designer
Michael Wilkinson
©[TBC]
Production

Companies
Columbia Pictures
and Annapurna
Pictures present an
Atlas Entertainment
production
A David O. Russell film
Executive Producers
Matthew Budman
Bradley Cooper
Eric Warren Singer
George Parra

Cast
Christian Bale
Irving Rosenfeld
Bradley Cooper
Richie DiMaso
Jeremy Renner
Carmine Polito
Amy Adams
Sydney Prosser,
'Lady Edith'
Jennifer Lawrence
Rosalyn Rosenfeld
Louis C.K.

Stoddard Thorsen
Michael Peña
Paco Hernandez,
'Sheik Abdullah'
Alessandro Nivola
Anthony Amado
Robert De Niro
Victor Tellegio
Dolby Digital/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film
Distributors Ltd
12,406 ft +8 frames

New York, 1978. Con artist Irving 'Irv' Rosenfeld enlists his mistress Sydney Prosser into running a loan scam. Caught by FBI agent Richie DiMaso, they reluctantly agree to perform four scams on corrupt politicians. After Richie's eagerness threatens a first encounter, the three entrap Mayor Carmine Polito, promising Atlantic City regeneration investment by an Arab sheikh. Sydney flirts with Richie. Irv and his volatile wife Rosalyn befriend Carmine. At celebration for the investment, Mafia boss Tellegio is suspicious of the fake sheikh. Rosalyn confronts Sydney and flirts with Mafia member Pete. Sydney reveals to a horrified Richie that she is not 'Lady Edith', her con persona. Richie hubristically turns on his FBI boss. Six Congressmen and a Senator are entrapped by the fake-sheikh con. Rosalyn tells Pete of

her suspicions that Irv is seeing government agents. Irv is threatened by Pete but proposes a US\$2m transfer from the sheikh to Tellegio. At Tellegio's lawyer's office, Sydney secretly audio-tapes the lawyer offering to provide intimidation and pay-offs for the proposed casino. The US\$2m is transferred. Irv confesses the scam to Carmine. The FBI discovers Richie was conned. The lawyer transaction was a fake staged by Irv and Sydney and the US\$2m is missing. Irv had warned off the Mafia. In return for joint immunity and a reduced sentence for Carmine, they return the money. FBI bosses claim credit for the political arrests, excluding Richie. Rosalyn leaves with Pete, allowing Irv and Sydney to start over together with a legitimate art business.



Toxic shock: Matthew McConaughey as Ron Woodroof, with Jennifer Garner as sympathetic doctor Eve Saks, in *Dallas Buyers Club*

Dallas Buyers Club

USA 2013

Director: Jean-Marc Vallée

Certificate 15 116m 31s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

See Industry
section,
page 14

"I'm not gay but I was very artistic and always felt different from other people," Jean-Marc Vallée said, talking about his 2005 film *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, in which young Zachary (Marc-André Grondin) needs two hours and more than two decades to accept his homosexuality. *Dallas Buyers Club* picks up a few years after *C.R.A.Z.Y.* left off, this time directly placing a straight character at the centre of another predominantly gay cultural narrative. The only way to date the opening sequences to 1985 are newspaper headlines announcing Rock Hudson's death, and Ron Woodroof's reaction: "Did you know Rock Hudson was a cocksucker?" Introduced during a threesome in a ringside rodeo pen, sometime bull rider Ron (Matthew McConaughey) is baroquely/comically juxtaposed with men in the background trying to stay mounted on bucking broncos. A high-pitched drone conveys the as-yet inexplicable exhaustion he won't acknowledge, its piercing tone a recurring expression of HIV's debilitating side effects.

In 1987, the real Woodroof established a large business for drugs yet to be approved by the FDA, following the precedent of a New York City scheme established earlier that year. Instead of illegally paying for unapproved medications, Woodroof's subscribers paid monthly memberships entitling them to all the free drugs they wanted. Operating in a legal grey zone, by 1992 the Dallas Buyers Club had 4,000 regular customers. Bill Minutaglio's source article from that year (published in *The Dallas Morning News* a few months before his

subject's death) discusses other such clubs in detail and mentions rumblings of discontent at the Dallas organisation's prices. The film, however, is focused on, and is unambiguously positive about, Woodroof's activities.

Craig Borten and Melisa Wallack's script provides moral redemption through capitalistic enterprise for Ron's casually virulent homophobia ("I'll kick your faggot ass") and racism ("Why you want to go work for those sand niggers?"). Given 30 days to live when diagnosed, Ron reads through his library's magazines and microfiches, concluding that he needs the drug AZT to survive. Since it's not yet FDA-approved, Ron pays a hospital janitor to steal bottles sent for a trial. When that supply dries up, he drives to Mexico and learns from a disbarred doctor (Griffin Dunne) about seemingly more effective, less toxic drug cocktails.

With the help of his (entirely fictional)

transvestite partner Rayon (Jared Leto), Ron sheds his prejudices, growing both his bank account and his soul. Ron and Rayon's friendship is delineated with unsentimental economy, free of hackneyed contextual montages of activism or general signs-of-the-times markers. By his own count, Leto lost between 30 and 40 pounds to play his emaciated part, McConaughey around 50. (Both actors have shirtless shots to make sure their efforts aren't lost on viewers.) Two different social/sexual worlds are bridged by their equally cadaverous frames.

The film both channels and narrows lingering rage at the American government for not responding faster to the Aids crisis



Counter argument: the film details Woodroof's battle for access to the best HIV medication



The odd couple: McConaughey with Jared Leto as his friend and ally Rayon

Ron adapts with life-sustaining pragmatism and stereotypically Texan *braggadocio* to his HIV-positive status and new social circle. McConaughey's native-son credentials are impeccable and his survivalist cowboy attentantly convincing, transcending potential regional caricature. Shopping with Rayon, Ron confronts a former friend who ostracised him after his HIV diagnosis. In revenge, Ron exacts a handshake for Rayon, putting his ex-pal into a headlock while yelling, "Shake his hand!" This key transitional scene puts Texan masculine aggression to progressive social ends, a questionable but crowd-pleasing moment of mild corrective violence.

The story's his, with Rayon an undeniably tokenistic side character relegated to sporadic bravura scenes of Leto spiralling into an increasingly fractious, tearful state of comatose survival, as heroin and Aids take their combined toll. Late in the film, Ron confesses that all he wants is for his life "to mean something". "It does," he's comforted, and the film ends with a nice round of applause for the heroic heterosexual. *Dallas Buyers Club* can be slotted alongside 2005's *Brokeback Mountain* and 2008's *Milk*, two of the relatively few films with marquee-value straight actors enacting gay life. It's reasonable to complain that *Dallas* takes a story about a straight man's experience and places it at the centre of a larger Aids narrative in which homophobia, social ostracism et al are primarily his problem.

Noting and setting aside *Dallas Buyers Club*'s representational issues, there's much to enjoy. It's been 20 years since *Philadelphia*, a film commonly invoked in reviews because of the lack of comparable precedents, but *Buyers Club* lacks that film's conscious sobriety or the decorousness taking the edge off *Brokeback* and *Milk*. Woodroof begins as an objectionable figure, and his adeptness at becoming a global drug smuggler has an air of comical efficiency. The lack of *pro forma* sentimentality and the

non-judgemental tone when recording drug/alcohol consumption eliminate any hint of infection as karmic moral retribution, and dispel the dreadful suggestion, found in some disease/history movies, that the tragedy isn't the mass unnecessary death being personalised but the fact that in this case it's happened to an exceptionally wonderful individual.

Ron locating his first AZT hook-up is conveyed in one wordless cut from McConaughey sidling up to a hospital janitor at a strip-club bar to a parking-lot money drop-off/drug pick-up the next morning. Vallée similarly streamlines his first two acts to often bracing effect, only pausing McConaughey's charisma for a gloppy third act and constant attacks on the for-profit US medical

establishment. "Like it or not, this is a business," squirrely hospital doctor Sevard (Denis O'Hare) tells his idealistic colleague Eve Saks (Jennifer Garner). The film both channels and narrows lingering rage at the American government for not responding faster to the Aids crisis, arguing (mostly through circumstantial evidence) that the FDA, pharmaceutical companies and private care providers then (and implicitly now) systematically made it difficult for average Americans to get good medical treatment efficiently or affordably.

Not a landmark, then, and perhaps unintentionally regressive, but lively and topically polemical enough to raise the normative bar for well-intentioned straight takes on gay life, a genre too new to die too soon. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Robbie Brenner
Rachel Winter
Written by
Craig Borten
Melissa Wallack
Director of Photography
Yves Bélanger
Editors
John Mac McMurry
Martin Pensa

Production Designer
John Paino
Sound Supervisor
Martin Pinsonnault
Costume Designers
Kurt and Bart

©Dallas Buyers Club, LLC
Production Companies
A Focus Features and

Truth Entertainment
presentation of a
Voltage Pictures/
R2 Films/Evolution
Independent
production
Executive Producers
David Bushell
Nathan Ross
Tony Notargiacomo
Joe Newcomb
Nicolas Chartier

Zev Foreman
Logan Levy
Holly Wiersma
Cassian Elwes

Cast
Matthew
McConaughey
Ron Woodroof
Jennifer Garner
Dr Eve Saks

Jared Leto
Rayon
Denis O'Hare
Dr Sevard
Steve Zahn
Tucker
Michael O'Neill
Richard Barkley
Dallas Roberts
David Wayne
Griffin Dunne
Dr Vass

Kevin Rankin
T.J.

**Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]**

Distributor
E1 Films

10,486 ft +8 frames

Dallas, 1985. Electrician Ron Woodroof learns that he has contracted HIV from unprotected sex and is only expected to live another 30 days. After researching his treatment options, he concludes that the only effective existing drug is AZT. This can only be legally obtained through a trial study at his hospital, so Woodroof pays a janitor to steal supplies, until the drug is locked up. In Mexico, Woodroof meets Vass, a disbarred doctor, who believes that AZT does more harm than good.

After several months of taking Vass's custom drug cocktail, Woodroof buys a large supply of medications that haven't been approved by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) for sale in the US, and brings them back to Texas. With the help of Rayon, an HIV-positive transvestite, Woodroof builds a network of customers

for the drugs. Because buyers purchase membership of his club rather than the medications themselves, the organisation is not illegal. As the business expands, Woodroof makes more trips abroad to purchase different medications. His deepening friendship with Rayon leads him to rethink his homophobic attitudes. Hospital doctor Eve Saks realises that her drug-test patients have stopped coming to their sessions and are using Woodroof's medications instead. Woodroof convinces her that AZT is toxic, and persuades her to lower her patients' dosage to the minimum. As a result she is fired. Rayon, whose heroin dependency has worsened, dies. After repeated legal difficulties with the FDA and IRS, Woodroof has his access to the drug Peptide T taken away. He dies in 1992.



In the shadows: Ralph Fiennes as Charles Dickens and Felicity Jones as Ellen Ternan, in *The Invisible Woman*

The Invisible Woman

United Kingdom/USA 2012

Director: Ralph Fiennes

Certificate 12A 111m 20s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

On 9 June 1865 Charles Dickens and his young lover Ellen Ternan, returning from a stay in France, were involved in a train crash near Staplehurst in Kent. Ellen's arm was broken, and though Dickens avoided serious injury it was a traumatic experience for him; he lost his voice for two weeks and according to his son never fully recovered. (He died five years later to the day.) But in Ralph Fiennes's film (based on Claire Tomalin's biography of the same title) it's traumatic for a different reason: while Dickens is tending Ellen's injuries, a guard, recognising him, asks if he was travelling alone. At first he doesn't reply, but when the question is repeated he reluctantly says that he was. It's at this point that Ellen realises her celebrated lover will never publicly acknowledge her; she'll always remain 'the invisible woman'.

As Fiennes plays him, Dickens is a man craving public adulation, drinking it in like a drug. At

one point we see him mobbed by a huge crowd, all eager to speak to him and shake his hand, to tell him how much they love and admire his work; his grin is avid, almost wolfish, as if he can never get enough of this homage to satisfy him. "Do you like this life," Ellen asks him, "constantly on show, constantly watched?" It's evident that he does – in fact he thrives on it. But her "constantly watched" points to the downside: his adoring public are everywhere, and were he to be exposed in a lapse from the standards of Victorian propriety it could destroy him. Dickens's genius as a writer was to be perfectly in tune with the spirit of his age (Trollope, in *The Warden*, satirised him as 'Mr Popular Sentiment') while at the same time transcending it; but it was also his fatal limitation as a man, trapping him in the cage of conventional morality.

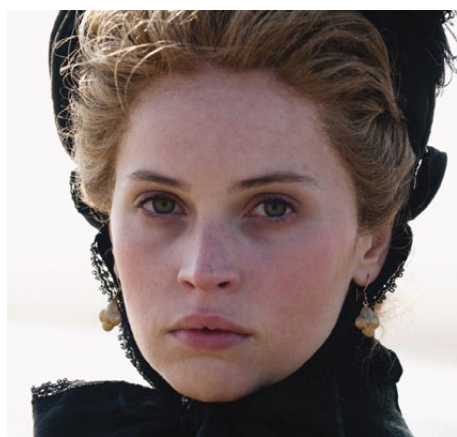
Fiennes's reading of Dickens's personality is amply borne out by Tomalin's account, from which Abi Morgan has developed her script. The novelist, as Tomalin notes, "wished to be, and generally was, worshipped – the word is not too strong for a person who evoked comparison with Christ at the time of his death – as a man of unblemished character, the incarnation of

broad Christian virtue and at the same time of domestic harmony and conviviality". We see that he also urgently needs to be the centre of attention, the life and soul of every party, whether it's directing the theatricals at which he meets Ellen (a production in Manchester of his friend Wilkie Collins's abysmal play *The Frozen Deep*), presiding at a smart social gathering or organising games with his family in the garden. Fiennes tellingly conveys the drivenness in everything Dickens does, the insecurity behind the all-encompassing jollity. Years after his death Ellen's schoolteacher husband George Robinson, watching her rehearse another play, this time one that Dickens collaborated on with Collins, muses: "One wonders what demons raged in his mind."

Ellen too is driven, as we can tell from our first glimpse of her, striding doggedly out across the shingle of the Margate shoreline, clad entirely in black; 13 years after her lover's death, and now a respectably married woman, she's evidently still in mourning for her lost life, trying to outpace her own memories and her own restless disappointment. "Being married," her mother Frances (Kristin Scott Thomas) warned her, "is at times the loneliest



As director, Fiennes resists all temptation to indulge in Dickensian melodrama, staging the most emotionally charged moments with restraint



Luminous: Jones is the 'invisible woman'

place," and it's clear that Ellen has found it so. Unburdening herself to sympathetic reverend William Benham (John Kavanagh), she recalls how after the rail accident Dickens installed her in a house near Windsor, well away from the observant eyes and gossiping tongues of London, and she realised: "Then this is how it is to be now." Being a mistress, she discovered, can be no less lonely – perhaps even more so.

As Ellen, Felicity Jones surpasses even her own previous performances, holding her own opposite Fiennes although cast in the quieter, more reactive role. She lends Ellen something of the charged ambiguity she brought to her English exchange student in Drake Doremus's recent chamber drama *Breathe In* – again playing a young woman half flattered, half disconcerted by the attentions of a much older man but here adding a level of luminous vulnerability and a sure sense of period style. The play of conflicting emotions across her face is subtle yet unfailingly expressive, most eloquently when she's forced to assess all the implications, both pro and con, of what's being proposed to her: when she tells Collins, who's been blathering that men and women should be free from social convention, "You see a freedom that I do not see," there's a wealth of meaning and reproach behind her words. Dickens is offering her moneyed comfort, a degree of material security that, as a member of a struggling family of actors, she's never known; but at the same time – as she's well aware and Collins must be too – it's a trap.

As director, Fiennes resists all temptation to indulge in Dickensian melodrama; there's no lachrymose deathbed scene, for a start, even though, according to Tomalin, Ellen was present at her lover's death. Instead he stages the most emotionally charged moments with a restraint that lends them an understated intensity. The first time Dickens and Ellen are alone together – or almost so – it is late at night in his study, when they're counting the takings after a marathon charity event. Her mother's there as well, but drops off to sleep (or perhaps tactfully pretends to), so the encounter takes place in subdued voices that heighten the intimacy of the dialogue. In subdued lighting, too: throughout the film Fiennes makes expressive use of shadow, a theme echoed in the dialogue. Exchanges between the couple are often shot with both of them in darkened silhouette, reflecting Ellen's place on the shadow-side of the great man's spotlight life. By way of contrast there's a tumultuous, high-coloured racecourse sequence, inspired by the ebullience of William Powell Frith's best-known painting *The Derby Day*.

Besides Scott Thomas (faultless as ever if rather underused), Fiennes draws nuanced performances from the rest of his cast, not least Tom Hollander as Dickens's raffish friend Collins and Joanna Scanlan as the ill-used Catherine Dickens. Collins, also famous but without his friend's pristine reputation to preserve (as a writer of 'sensation' novels, a touch of bad-boy image would probably, if anything, have boosted his sales), "despises marriage", as his mistress notes, and lives with her openly and happily. Hollander plays him as a pint-sized jovial satyr, cheerfully professing outrageous views ("We have to break these conventions – smash 'em up!") and not above teasing his respectable fellow writer for his buttoned-up lifestyle. As Catherine, Scanlan gives a performance of moving pathos,

retaining her dignity even when sent by her husband to give Ellen a bracelet delivered to her by mistake. "She comprehends nothing, she sees nothing," Dickens tells Ellen, trying to justify his callous act. "I thought if she saw you she would understand that I have nothing with her."

Marking a strong advance from the slightly strained pyrotechnics of *Coriolanus* (2011), Fiennes's second film as actor-director handles its material with an impressively sure touch and an alert sense of period. In the few cases where he and Morgan deviate from their source (in the film, Ellen bears a stillborn child, Tomalin leaves it at unproven) it's dramatically justified. This is an intelligent, exceptionally well-crafted film: Dickens surely wouldn't have welcomed the subject matter but he might reluctantly have acknowledged the skill of the telling. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Gabrielle Tana
Stewart Mackinnon
Christian Baute
Carolyn Marks
Blackwood
Written by
Abi Morgan
Based on the book
by Claire Tomalin
Director of
Photography
Rob Hardy
Editor
Nicolas Gaster
Production
Designer
Maria Djurkovic
Composer
Ilan Eshkeri
Production
Sound Mixer
Peter Lindsay
Costume Designer
Michael O'Connor

©Headline Pictures
(Invisible Woman)
Limited, British
Broadcasting
Corporation and
British Film Institute
Production
Companies

BBC Films and
BFI present in
association with
West End Films,
Magnolia Mae
Films and Taeco
Entertainment
A Headline Pictures
and Magnolia Mae
Films production
in association with
Lonely Dragon
A Ralph Fiennes film
Developed with
the assistance
of BBC Films
Made through
the British Film
Institute's Film Fund
Executive
Producers
Sharon Harel
Maya Amsellem
Eve Schoukroun
Stefano Ferrari
Christine Langan
Jamie Laurenson

Cast
Ralph Fiennes
Charles Dickens
Felicity Jones
Ellen Ternan, 'Nelly'

Kristin Scott
Thomas
Mrs Frances Ternan
Tom Hollander
Wilkie Collins
Joanna Scanlan
Catherine Dickens
Perdita Weeks
Maria Ternan
Amanda Hale
Fanny Ternan
Tom Burke
Mr George Wharton
Robinson
John Kavanagh
Reverend William
Benham
Michael Marcus
Charley Dickens
Tom Attwood
Mr Lambourne
Susanna Hishop
Mary

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

10,020 ft +0 frames

Margate, 1883. Nelly Robinson, a headmaster's wife, walks agitatedly on the shore. She has been rehearsing the pupils in a play, 'No Thoroughfare', by Charles Dickens and his friend Wilkie Collins, and this has brought back memories for her. Under the sympathetic questioning of the vicar, William Benham, she recalls how, aged 18, she met Dickens. As actress Ellen Ternan, she was cast, along with her mother and sister, in a play by Collins that Dickens, then aged 45, was producing in Manchester. Wearying of his marriage to Catherine, Dickens is struck by Ellen's intelligence and beauty. Though fearing public obloquy, Ellen is drawn to the novelist, who's at the height of his fame. Her mother Frances, while also worried about scandal, recognises that Ellen's acting talents are limited and that she may be better off as Dickens's mistress.

Dickens takes Ellen to visit Collins and his mistress, Caroline Graves. Ellen is offended, but despite this yields to the novelist's passionate entreaties, and they become lovers. Dickens tells Catherine that their marriage is over and that he's leaving her. He and Ellen go to France together, where she bears a stillborn child. On their return, they're involved in a train crash in Kent, and Dickens tells a railway official that he was travelling alone. Ellen realises that Dickens, fearing for his public image, will never openly acknowledge her and that she must always remain in the shadows. In 1870 Dickens dies, and Ellen later marries George Robinson. She unburdens herself to Benham, but her husband fends off her attempt to tell him the truth.



Teen spirit: blending staged scenes with archive footage, Matt Wolf's *Teenage* focuses on the lives of four emblematic individuals

Teenage

USA/United Kingdom 2013

Director: Matt Wolf

Reviewed by Sukhdev Sandhu

"We are teenagers. But we didn't always exist." Matt Wolf's essayistic adaptation of Jon Savage's 2007 history of the teenager begins as a song of liberation. It opens with the introduction of the labour laws that stopped young children in much of America and Europe from toiling 70 hours a week. If images of workers leaving factories define early cinema, here is an equally important archive – that of cheery youths, later to become (for good or bad) one of the most valuable demographics for Anglo-American cinema, tumbling gaily out of the mills and sweatshops in which they'd previously been incarcerated.

Perhaps the teenager's story was one of emergence as much as emancipation. What was this strange creature that social reformers had helped to spawn? Unchecked testosterone and fissile energy, the teenager soon became a

vector of modernity, a symbol for an increasingly unmoored and alienating society. Teenagers themselves were aliens who had to be contained, modified, banished. Wolf shows how Baden-Powell's Boy Scout movement became not just a rod of ideological correction – Christianity, patriotism and monarchy were exalted. Very soon, according to one of the film's adolescent narrators, "We went from rat-faced slum kids to fit and healthy soldiers... primed for war."

From filmed novels such as *Brighton Rock* and *A Clockwork Orange* to the social panics legally embodied in Asbos, teenagers – with their liminal, transitional identities – have often been portrayed as wayward minority groups and public menaces. But Savage (a justly celebrated pop historian) and Wolf (whose 2008 Arthur Russell documentary *Wild Combination* portrayed its subject more as gentle dreamer than austere avant-gardist) mostly sidestep discourses of delinquency and instead portray adolescence as a rare flower. Beginning with 7 Up-style clips of young men and women talking about their ambitions, they're drawn to teenagers for their vulnerability and anarchism, their fragility and

appetite, the way they represent a world before the compromises and calluses of adulthood.

The film focuses on four emblematic teenagers from the first half of the 20th century and ends at VE Day – a wise decision, as what followed has been endlessly repurposed and fetishised in countless *The Rock 'n' Roll Years*-format documentaries. This also draws attention to the film's rare, often emotive use of archival footage from Germany, Britain and America – most notably a home movie shot by future Blackshirt Oswald Mosley of future fashion photographer Cecil Beaton and future dandy-recluse Stephen Tennant. The image bank from which the filmmakers draw must be almost unimaginable to contemporary teenagers, who document and distribute footage of themselves at torrential levels.

Wolf, foregrounding a mood of drift and reverie, of attenuation over stridency, mostly doesn't supply dates or details for the historical footage. The voiceovers (by Jena Malone, Ben Whishaw, Julia Hummer and Jessie Usher) also insist on the right to roam, alternating between diary entries, philosophical ruminations and

social contextualisations. Often it's hard to know who is talking, and as a result there's a sense of teenagers as a collective entity, a swarm-being.

At the same time, most notably in the use of re-enactments for the section on 1920s Bright Young Things (which recall the antics of Warhol's Factory crowd and the early Super-8 films of Derek Jarman), one gets the distinct impression that Wolf and Savage are into freaks rather than geeks, that it's those adolescents born into money or interesting times – Flappers, say, or German Swing Kids rebelling against Nazi ideology – who most possess the teenage X factor.

A different film (though this one's strength is precisely in its affective rather than forensic qualities) would have probed class and national fault lines more strenuously: if being a teenager can only ever amount to a partial identity, does it really make much sense to link black adolescents growing up in segregated America in the 1920s and 1930s with the ra-ra rites of the English aristocracy? What's more, the teleology underlying the narrative is itself partial; there are still more than 150 million child labourers around the world today – many of them servicing the consumption habits of an engorged west.

Bradford Cox from *Deerhunter* provides the film's twinkling, ambient, vaguely retro-futurist score, but the most striking aspect of the sound design is the flatness and sadness of the four exemplary characters' voices. They reflect on the societies in which they've grown up and their scarcely articulable dreams of otherness in a manner that sounds listless, anhedonic, crushed in advance. They exude the depleted serotonin levels of the cast of a Gus Van Sant film.

Those kinds of sonic resonances make sense. Today's western teenagers face a bleak future of debt, precarity, permanent austerity. If the dreams that animated their forebears no longer have potency, then the voices in this film are necessary ghostly, acoustic traces of a barely insurgent tribe. Or perhaps they serve as a pre-haunting, a pointer to the possibility that, to use the title of Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah's bitter 1968 postcolonial novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

Yet *Teenage* doesn't end dolefully. Quite the reverse. Near its close, the teenager, increasingly invoked by wartime advertisers and even the



Ra-ra rites: recreating the troubled times of a Bright Young Thing in 1920s Britain

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Ben Howe

Kyle Martin

Written by

Jon Savage

Matt Wolf

Based on the book

Teenage: The

Creation of Youth

Culture 1875-1945

by Jon Savage

Director of

Photography

Nick Bentgen

Edited by

Joe Beshenkovsky

Production Designer

Inbal Weinberg

Original Music

Bradford Cox

Sound Designer

Mark Phillips

Costume Designer

Tere Duncan

production

A film by Matt Wolf

Supported by TFI

Documentary Fund,

Jerome Foundation,

PUMA Creative

Catalyst Award in

partnership with

Channel 4 BRITDOC

Foundation,

Independent

Feature Project

Produced in

association

with Center for

Independent

Documentary

Developed in

association with

Beetz Filmproduktion

GmbH & Co. KG

Executive Producers

Jason Schwartzman

Philipp Engelhorn

Michael Raisler

Cast

narrators

Jena Malone

American girl

Ben Whishaw

British boy

Julia Hummer

German girl

Jessie Usher

American boy

featuring

Leah Hennessey

Brenda Dean Paul

Ivy Blackshire

Melita Maschmann

Daniela Leder

Melita Maschmann

(voice)

Ben Rosenfield

Tommie Scheel

Malik Peters

Warren Wall

In Colour and

Black and White

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Soda Pictures

A documentary about teenagers, inspired by Jon Savage's book of the same name.

The film begins in the early years of the 20th century, when the introduction of labour laws forces children out of factories. In western societies there are soon moral panics about teenagers' hooligan tendencies, but two major developments emerge to contain and discipline young people: the birth of the Boy Scout movement and the start of World War I. The latter sees millions of young men from both sides of the Atlantic being sent to the front. After 1918, western societies begin searching for new energies. In America – with its fashions, music and confidence – dreams of rebellion begin to take shape.

The film focuses on four teenagers from the 20th century: Brenda Dean Paul, an English 'Bright Young Thing' who develops drug problems; Tommie Scheel, a German 'Swing Kid'; Melita Maschmann, who is drawn to the Hitler Youth movement; and Warren Wall, a black American Scout who has to deal with racial segregation in his country. By the end of World War II, the hopes and desires of younger people are championed by mass media and catered to by an increasingly affluent America. As a socioeconomic category, the teenager is here to stay.

subject of a 1944 *New York Times* 'bill of rights', seems on the brink of being commodified and de-fanged. But then, like some situationist Zelig, like a light that can never be fully dimmed again, the teenager re-emerges – a coda in which a sparky montage sequence, altogether zappier than the rest of the film, captures youthful figures not just smashing down chunks of the Berlin Wall or attending the Love Parade in that city, and not just breakdancing or sporting punk garb, but in militant uprisings in South Africa and facing up to tanks in Tiananmen Square.

It's heartwarming stuff, though it might surprise seasoned dissidents and Gulag exiles to learn that their struggles were aftershocks from an early-20th-century youthquake, or were in some way connected to a Sven Våth techno track. Then again, it's precisely the imprecision and sprawl of these connections that Wolf and Savage are claiming as a key element in the imaginative weaponry of teenagers, the fact that they haven't chiselled and planned their idealism into something that can pass for sense and sensibility. Or, as The Undertones sang, "Teenage dreams [are] so hard to beat..." ☺

©Teenage
Documentary
PSC, LLC
Production
Companies
A Cinereach

After Tiller

USA 2013

Directors: Martha Shane, Lana Wilson

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

The subject of later-term abortions – which, in the providers' language, 'euthanise' foetuses that might technically be viable, and involve a labour and birth rather than a surgical procedure – complicates the binary nature of 'pro-choice' and 'anti-choice' stances. The Roe vs Wade ruling of 1973 leaves it up to individual American states to ban third-trimester abortions; currently they are allowed without restriction in nine states, though they account for less than 1 per cent of all abortions carried out in the US.

The Tiller of the title, Dr George Tiller, was assassinated by anti-abortion activists in 2009. The other doctors portrayed in this film, all Tiller's erstwhile friends and associates, perform late-term abortions for parents whose potential babies face lives severely affected by mental or physical disability, but also for women who have been 'in denial' about their pregnancies and have left a decision to the last minute. Many viewers will feel more comfortable with the former scenario than the latter, but this is where Martha Shane and Lana Wilson's documentary becomes an important and difficult philosophical challenge: lines must be drawn, and someone has to draw them. Most lucid on this point is the enormously sympathetic Dr Susan Robinson, who describes the challenge of making decisions based on the woman's 'story' – "What if you're just not a good storyteller?" Ultimately, she argues with force that "women are able to struggle with complex ethical issues and come to the right decisions for them and their families. They are the world experts on their own lives." But this contention doesn't protect the doctors from the fact that, as Dr Shelley Sella frankly notes, they are terminating and disposing of babies, not scraps of tissue. That the realities of this work are not easily processed even by those who are committed to its continuation comes through clearly, making a throwaway nonsense of the activists' frequent claims that they are opposing thoughtless evil.

That said, the film might have achieved a little more balance had it permitted some thoughtful input from a voice on the other side of the debate; though they all engage at points with



In the line of fire: Dr Susan Robinson

the ethical dark side of their work, the film does slightly risk deifying its doctors by letting them speak eloquently and at length while largely portraying their opponents as faceless cranks. Lengthy meditation on the risks to the doctors' lives and families seems something of a waste of screen time, since those sympathetic to them will obviously believe in their right to live unharassed, while those who oppose them will think their fears entirely justifiable and deserved. Whether many of those opponents would actually sit through Shane and Wilson's film is another question: preaching to the converted is a clear risk for work like this, and many who could stand to hear and engage with its arguments will not give it the time of day. Still, the detail of the film provides a challenge even to those who feel themselves clearly and decisively pro-choice, and as such it contributes importantly to a complex debate too often reduced to imaginary moral absolutes. Its presentation is elegant, and its engagement with its intellectual and emotional issues both sensitive and bold. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Martha Shane
Lana Wilson
Written by
Greg O'Toole
Martha Shane
Lana Wilson
Director of Photography
Hillary Spera

Edited by
Greg O'Toole
Original Score
Andy Cabic
Eric D. Johnson
Location Sound Mixers
Martha Shane
Lana Wilson

©[none given]
Production Companies
Executive Producers:
Artemis Media
Ventures, Belle
Max Productions
In association with
Chicken & Eggs
Pictures Mother Wit

Human Rights Fund
Supported by
anonymous, Lebowitz
Family Foundation,
The Educational
Foundation of
America, International
Documentary
Association Pare
Lorentz Documentary

Fund, Independent
Feature Project, The
Nirvana Mahana
Institute, The Vladimir
and Araxia Buckhantz
Foundation, Puffin
Foundation, Sarah
Jacobson Film Grant,
Sundance Institute
Documentary Film

Program and Fund

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
November Films

A documentary portrait of four American doctors who carry out abortions after the 25th week of pregnancy. They are all former colleagues of Dr George Tiller, the Kansas abortion provider who was murdered in 2009 by activists opposed to his work, and all describe the harassment and fear of assassination with which they live.

In Nebraska, anti-abortion activists pray outside the clinic of Dr LeRoy Carhart. In Albuquerque, Dr Shelley Sella and Dr Susan Robinson work with and counsel women who have elected to have late-term abortions due to severe foetal abnormalities. Dr Warren Hern of Boulder, Colorado, describes how experience of

the aftermaths of illegal abortions and the abuse of unwanted children has strengthened his resolve to continue his work in the face of sustained opposition. Dr Carhart's work in Nebraska is restricted by the 2010 passing of the Fetal Pain Bill, which asserts that foetuses can feel pain after 20 weeks' gestation. He opens a new clinic in Iowa. Robinson refuses to perform a late abortion for a woman who telephones from France, and discusses the burden of making such decisions based on the woman's testimony. Iowa activists prevent Dr Carhart's clinic from opening; he tries again in Maryland, succeeding with the support of a sympathetic landlord who refuses to bow to activist pressure.

Age of Uprising

France/Germany 2013

Director: Arnaud des Pallières

Certificate 15 121m 47s

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

As its Cannes-premiere title *Michael Kohlhaas* implies, Arnaud des Pallières's fourth feature is adapted from Heinrich von Kleist's 1811 novella about a horse trader's quest for justice after being wronged both by a young baron acting above his authority and by a legal system weighted in the latter's favour. Although originally set in 16th-century Brandenburg and Saxony, the story's universality has seen it relocated several times (in 1999, John Badham even turned it into a western, *The Jack Bull*), with the most faithful adaptation, Volker Schlöndorff's *Man on Horseback* (1969) presenting David Warner's Kohlhaas as an out-and-out revolutionary. However, des Pallières and co-adaptor Christelle Berthevas prefer to strip Kleist's story down to its bare essentials, presenting their Kohlhaas (Mads Mikkelsen) not as a great rebellious figurehead but as an ordinary man who only reluctantly turns to vigilantism when left with no alternative.

Although individual ingredients (widescreen cinematography, ravishing landscapes, massed groups of men on horseback, flaming-arrow set pieces, close-ups of Mikkelsen in grizzled-warrior mode) suggest a rousing quasi-western, it's clear from a very early stage that des Pallières is aiming for something closer to the more austere medieval films of Ingmar Bergman (*The Virgin Spring*, 1960), Walerian Borowczyk (*Blanche*, 1971) and Robert Bresson (*Lancelot du Lac*, 1974). Accordingly, the film's central set piece is not a daring raid but a sombre conversation with a Protestant theologian (Denis Lavant) about the moral dimension of what Kohlhaas is doing. Although this character is no longer explicitly identified as Martin Luther (a conceit that wouldn't survive the transplantation of the action to the mountainous Cévennes region of south-central France), he is nonetheless established as the translator of the Bible on which Kohlhaas has raised his children, so his arguments carry real weight – doubly so for the fact that the entire conversation is silently witnessed by Kohlhaas's teenage daughter Lisbeth.

This latter detail highlights the fact that women dominate Kohlhaas's life to a far greater extent than they did in the original text. Kleist's ruling prince has here had a sex change (adding an erotic charge to the otherwise faithfully staged scene in which the princess first sees Kohlhaas emerging from the bath), and after the violent death of Kohlhaas's wife Judith, he and Lisbeth share an unbreakable bond as she observes everything from the birth of a colt (a rare sight of Kohlhaas uncomplicatedly in his professional element) to several of his vengeful escapades. The latter are typically wordless affairs, with Kohlhaas and his men emerging out of the hillside fog, forensically carrying out appointed tasks and then melting away. (The first raid is largely silent aside from a baby's anguished screams, foreshadowing the theologian's point that even the most righteous vengeance will create innocent victims.)

Between raids, Kohlhaas's determination that none of his men break any laws beyond dispatching those already judged to be lawless is emphasised when he hangs a subordinate for looting. But, as the theologian points out,

Anchorman 2 The Legend Continues

USA 2013, Director: Adam McKay
Certificate 15 118m 36s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

While the first *Anchorman* was a box-office hit in the US, in Britain it was an old-fashioned, slow-burn, semi-cult, home-viewing success. Its theatrical release in September 2004 was modest and its reviews lukewarm. *Empire* gave it three stars out of five and the *Independent* called it "a bit rubbish"; *S&S*, meanwhile, found it toothless but "endearingly daft". Only after several years was it apparent that the film had somehow caught on – as much for Will Ferrell's 'Ron Burgundy' voice as for its quotable lines. Examples of its enduring currency include Peter Berg's latest film *Lone Survivor*, in which it is fondly referred to more than once, and Kanye West's 2010 Twitter apology to Taylor Swift.

Part of the first *Anchorman*'s appeal is its provisionality: much of it feels not only unscripted but as if the performers are on the edge of corpsing. The end credits run next to blooper material not easily distinguishable from the film proper; indeed, as it transpired, the release version was more or less a compilation of the funniest bits, the story as written having been discarded. (A version of the planned film, *Wake Up Ron Burgundy*, emerged on DVD.)

The hoopla attending the second *Anchorman*, which began almost two years ago and has been steadily maintained since, reduces this element of spontaneity and in doing so sheds a peculiarly unflattering light on the kind of movie culture that has come into being in the past decade. The first film proved well suited to the rise of social media – as copious single-line clips on YouTube, launched the year after its release, attest – but it was made in a quite different climate. A curious double-temporality is now in effect: a film (or television show) can expect to be stripped down for giftable parts almost instantly; yet, as the case of *Anchorman 2* demonstrates, this same culture can be desperately slow-moving and backwards-looking. No one in 2004 was asking for *Hot Shots! Part Trois*.

As with *Arrested Development*, another belatedly resurrected, much asked-for fan favourite from what now seem like virtually pre-internet days, *Anchorman 2* is not worth the wait, and some of it is embarrassingly unfunny. This time we know well in advance – because director Adam McKay gave *Empire* an interview to talk us through the 'key moments' of one of its various trailers – that an alternate cut using different jokes is on the cards, as with the 'Bizarro Cut' of David Wain's *Wanderlust* (2012); but the sad truth is that there are not enough jokes to go round in this one. Oddly, given the foregoing, the best scene is also the most pre-publicised: a ruckus between news crews featuring among other luminaries, as widely reported, West, Tina Fey and Sacha Baron Cohen.

There is a mild irony in this failure in that, unlike its predecessor, *Anchorman 2* has satirical pretensions, taking aim at the triviality of 24-hour news 'reporting' directly, and corporate media more broadly, but it's an unconsoling one. Even then, the fight scene is filled with dud lines: throughout the film there is the faint suggestion that just getting everyone to show up is achievement enough. Steve Carell, almost unknown when he appeared in



Manhunt: Mads Mikkelsen

Kohlhaas's actions implicitly spurn God's own justice, a conundrum that Kohlhaas, with his concern for strict legal correctness, can never fully resolve. Neither can the film, if truth be told. Although comparisons with Bergman, Borowczyk and Bresson aren't wholly misplaced, des Pallières doesn't come close to matching their visual and conceptual rigour and consequently falls well short of bringing off the associated transcendence, despite occasional hints in that direction (notably an early scene in which Lisbeth is abandoned in a wood full of threateningly spiky trees).

This is a particular shame given that the brooding, taciturn Mikkelsen is perfectly cast, his outsider status emphasised by his strongly accented French (at one point, he slips seamlessly into the character's native German), while

his naturally regal bearing is altogether more convincing than that of the characters claiming bloodline authority. When she finally appears, the princess looks more like Lisbeth's slightly older sister than the ultimate arbiter of the fate of thousands, a vulnerability emphasised by her candid admission that had Kohlhaas not accepted her amnesty, he might well have defeated her militarily. But what then? Kohlhaas's problem isn't with the rules themselves, just their inconsistent application – even though he knows that if he achieves his aim, he will have no alternative but to accept his ultimate fate. As Kohlhaas silently waits for sentence to be carried out, his eyes betray his keen awareness of the perfectly logical trap that his own arguments have led him into: it's little wonder that Franz Kafka regarded Kleist's original so highly. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Serge Lalou
Producers
(Germany)
Martina Haubrich
Gunnar Dedio
Written by
Christelle Berthevas
Arnaud des Pallières
Freely inspired by
the novella Michael
Kohlhaas by
Heinrich von Kleist
Director of
Photography
Jeanne Lapoirie
Editors
Sandie Bompar
Arnaud des Pallières
Art Director

Yan Arlaud

Original Music
Martin Wheeler
Sound
Jean-Pierre Duret
Costume Designer
Anina Diener
©Arte France
Cinéma, ZDF/Arte,
Rhône-Alpes Cinéma,
Hérodiade, K'tien
Productions, LOOKS
Filmproduktionen,
Les Films d'Ici
Production
Companies
Les Films d'Ici
presents a LOOKS
Filmproduktionen,

Arte France
Cinéma, ZDF/Arte,
Région Languedoc
Roussillon,
Rhône-Alpes
Cinéma, Hérodiade,
K'tien Productions
co-production
With the participation
of Canal+, Ciné+,
Arte France,
Région Languedoc
Roussillon, Région
Rhône-Alpes,
Centre National du
Cinéma et de l'Image
Animée, Ministère
de la culture et de
la Communication,
Filmförderungsan-

stalt, Mitteldeutsche
Medienförderung
In association with
Cinéma 6
Developed with the
support of Procirep,
Media Programme
of the European
Union, Région
Languedoc Roussillon
and in association
with Cofinova 5
and Soficapital
A film produced by
Les Films d'Ici
Executive Producer
Florence Gilles

Cast

Mads Mikkelsen
Michael Kohlhaas
David Bennent
César
Paul Bartel
Jérémie
Christian Chausseux
manager
Swann Arlaud
baron
Bruno Ganz
governor
Delphine Chuillot
Judith
Mélusine Mayance
Lisbeth
Amira Casar
Abbe
Denis Lavant

theologian
Roxane Duran
Princess Angouleme

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film
Company

10,960 ft +8 frames

French theatrical title
Michael Kohlhaas

Sixteenth-century France. When horse trader Michael Kohlhaas attempts to cross the border to market (something he has done unmolested many times), he is informed that the newly installed baron demands he surrender his two black horses as collateral for his lack of a transit permit. Kohlhaas's servant César stays to look after the horses, but when he complains about them being worked in the field, he is savaged by the baron's dogs. Outraged, Kohlhaas sues the baron for reparations but the case is dismissed. When his wife Judith petitions the ruling princess directly, she returns covered in blood and dies shortly afterwards. Kohlhaas sells his property and forms a vigilante band, wreaking revenge on the baron's property and servants. When

the baron hides out in a convent, Kohlhaas and his men surround it with fire. Despite his insistence on propriety (including executing a subordinate for unauthorised looting), Kohlhaas's plans to sack an entire town are criticised by a Protestant theologian on moral grounds. Aware of her own military weakness, the ruling princess grants an amnesty if Kohlhaas refrains from further action. She visits him to ask why he agreed: he tells her that he is only interested in justice. When one of his men breaks the terms of the amnesty, Kohlhaas is arrested. Although his trial is scrupulously fair (he succeeds in obtaining financial reparations and the jailing of the baron), he is ultimately sentenced to death. His neck is bared to receive the executioner's blade.



For the high jump: David Koechner, Paul Rudd, Will Ferrell, Steve Carell,

the first film, now essentially slumming it in a supporting role, is particularly poor in a dreadful mock-romantic subplot involving Kristen Wiig (also slumming it), premised on their both being mentally ill; but

no one does him or herself credit. McKay and Ferrell have made very funny films together since *Anchorman* – above all *Step Brothers* (2008) – but whatever improvisatory magic there was on set ten years ago has not returned. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Judd Apatow
Will Ferrell
Adam McKay
Written by
Will Ferrell
Adam McKay
Based on characters created by Will Ferrell, Adam McKay
Director of Photography
Oliver Wood
Edited by
Brent White
Melissa Bretherton
Production Designer
Clayton Hartley

Music
Andrew Feltenstein
John Nau
Sound Mixer
Whit Norris
Costume Designer
Susan Matheson

©Paramount Pictures Corporation
Production Companies
Paramount Pictures presents a Gary Sanchez production
An Apatow production
An Adam McKay film
With the participation

of the Georgia Film, Music & Digital Entertainment Office
This production participated in the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development's Post Production Credit Program
Executive Producers
David Householder
Kevin Messick
Jessica Elbaum

Cast
Will Ferrell
Ron Burgundy
Steve Carell
Brick Tamland
Paul Rudd
Brian Fantana
David Koechner
Champ Kind
Christina Applegate
Veronica Corningstone
Dylan Baker
Freddie Shapp
Meagan Good
Linda Jackson
James Marsden

Jack Lime
Fred Willard
Ed Harken
Kristen Wiig
Chani Lastnamé
Josh Lawson
Kench Allenby
Chris Parnell
Garth
Judah Nelson
Walter Burgundy
Greg Kinnear
Gary
Harrison Ford
Mack Tannen

Dolby Digital/ Datasat

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK

10,674 ft +0 frames

New York, 1979. The happy marriage of television co-hosts Ron Burgundy and Veronica Corningstone is sundered when legendary evening presenter Mack Tannen quits and invites Veronica alone to replace him. Ron, who considers her acceptance a betrayal, returns to San Diego. At a low ebb, he is approached by TV producer Freddie to join GNN, America's first 24-hour news channel. Ron rounds up his old colleagues Brian, Brick and Champ and returns to New York, whereupon the gang learn that they have been assigned the graveyard slot. However, Ron wins record audiences by eschewing traditional news and concentrating instead on inane human-interest stories, often of a jingoistic or sexist character and accompanied by illegible fast-moving graphics. He begins an affair with his African-American boss Linda, but his racism offends her family. The commercial interests of station

chief Kench Allenby come into conflict with the one real news story Brian wants to cover – deaths caused by parts falling off planes operated by Allenby's airline – and so the story is spiked.

Ron's format sweeps the industry when his live coverage of a car chase beats Veronica's interview with Yasser Arafat in the ratings. Soon afterwards, however, Ron is blinded when a rival sabotages his ice-skating-and-jazz-flute act at a GNN victory celebration. Ron goes to live alone in a lighthouse. He is eventually joined by Veronica and their children, Veronica helping him to cope with his blindness. Ron returns to New York after doctors discover a cure, but when asked to cover another car-chase story rather than attend his son's piano recital, Ron cracks and quits on air. Ron and the gang fight off a number of rival news teams to get to the recital. Afterwards he is reunited once again with Veronica.

The Armstrong Lie

USA 2013

Director: Alex Gibney

Certificate 15 123m 30s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Documentarist Alex Gibney has built up a strong reputation as an able chronicler of some of the major issues of our times, from US military abuses in Iraq (*Taxi to the Dark Side*) to the Catholic Church's poor record on paedophile priests (*Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God*) and the impact of Julian Assange on the freedom-of-information debate (*We Steal Secrets: the Story of WikiLeaks*). As such, he would seem a safe pair of hands to tackle one of the most toxic sporting stories of recent years – the revelation that, far from being a modern-day hero, seven-times Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong, who had conquered cancer and earned millions for himself and his charitable foundation, had been living a lie, using the performance-enhancing drugs that had been rife in professional cycling for years.

Given carte blanche to assemble the material from scratch, perhaps Gibney at his best might have made this a definitive account, but it's clear that the final film is hobbled by two distinct factors. For one thing, Armstrong's grudging but headline-grabbing admission of guilt during a high-profile televised encounter with Oprah Winfrey means that the big revelation is already out there, and since Armstrong in interview here has little of substance to add, Gibney is left merely filling in the background detail in a way that will be of most interest to cycling aficionados. Secondly, while one can understand Gibney's decision to feature a significant amount of the footage he shot during Armstrong's 2009 'comeback' Tour for an earlier project (which was then shelved, possibly because Armstrong's third-place finish wasn't the story anyone was looking for), that race is essentially a footnote in the overall Armstrong saga and giving it such prominence is hard to justify – even if the sequences filmed in the thick of the Tour, with cameras gliding through the peloton, are certainly vivid enough.

While it's astute in its choice of witnesses and covers a fair spread of information, the final result is an unusually ill-focused entry in the Gibney filmography. Armstrong himself seems unwilling post-Oprah to offer any additional public soul-searching, and the more personal element, as Gibney's voiceover attempts to come to terms with how he'd been taken in by the star's carefully constructed iconic persona, doesn't really go anywhere. There's some dramatic frisson in observing the ongoing animosity between Armstrong and Betsy Andreu, wife of Frankie Andreu, the onetime teammate whose career was essentially destroyed when he refused to go along with Armstrong's well-oiled doping programme, but this never quite gets enough time in the spotlight.

What remains, however, is a valuable rundown of the technical detail of how blood-doping operated endemically in a sport whose governing body proved unable or unwilling to initiate a testing regime to uncover transgressions. As a result, Gibney seems justified in pinpointing the hypocrisy and bullying as Armstrong's major sins rather than the sustained intake of EPO, which pretty much all the other teams were injecting at the time, but his film throws little new psychological light on the motivations

August: Osage County

Director: John Wells
Certificate 15 120m 49s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

This is what happens when 'don't mess with success' leads to stultification. *August: Osage County* won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for drama for its author Tracy Letts, who has here adapted his stage play into a screenplay. Originally launched at Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre, the play lands on the big screen courtesy of a cabal of celebrity producers (George Clooney, Jean Doumanian, the Weinsteins), featuring an all-star ensemble cast led by Meryl Streep as matriarch Violet Weston and Julia Roberts as Barbara, the eldest Weston daughter and Violet's worthiest opponent.

This isn't the first stage-to-screen leap for Oklahoma-born Letts: his 1996 *Bug* was made into a film, with original star Michael Shannon, ten years after its run at London's Gate Theatre began, and an adaptation of Letts's first play *Killer Joe* debuted at the Venice Film Festival in 2011.

Both films were directed by William Friedkin, whose collaboration with Letts has provided him with a late-career renaissance. *August: Osage County*, however, was entrusted to one John Wells, executive producer and showrunner for a number of TV shows (*ER*, *The West Wing*) over the past 20 years, and the director of one previous feature, 2010's *The Company Men*. This is something like the difference between Tennessee Williams by Elia Kazan and Tennessee Williams by Daniel Mann.

Note the title. Letts is writing about a very particular environment and how that environment imposes itself on people. His setting is the burning dog days of summer on the flatlands of Oklahoma, and his characters repeatedly define the plains. "This is the plains," Barbara tells her estranged husband (Ewan McGregor). "A spiritual affliction, like the blues." "What do you know about life on these plains?" Violet later asks her daughters accusingly, "What do you know about hard times?" The Weston

home, where a great deal of this bickering occurs, is a tastefully furnished example of the production designer's craft but it exhibits none of the wear one would expect of a domestic battlefield that's seen decades of action. We're told that the Weston house is a sweatbox – Violet, Barbara recalls, kept it hot enough to kill off tropical birds – but there is no tactile sense of oppressive heat.

One crucial difference between theatre and cinema is that, where in the theatre you have to describe the oppressive heat and the pitiless plains, in the cinema you have the means to make an audience see and feel what you are talking about. *August: Osage County* fails to use the available tools: it's nothing but words. Wells is not only a veteran of a writer's medium, television, but a two-time president of the Writers Guild of America, West. This isn't to say that he's blindly obeisant to Letts's script – the finished film has been pared down significantly from the screenplay – but while subtractions have been made, very little has been added.

Wells's idea of 'cinematic' is reaching for the widescreen lens, which suits the gathered-ensemble dinner-table scene and a few generic vistas of pumping oil derricks. Otherwise, his framing effectively cuts off most full-body acting, which is what makes one scene with Chris Cooper, playing easygoing uncle Charles, so striking. Charles gives his wife (Margo Martindale) a dressing-down over her treatment of their son (an awful Benedict Cumberbatch), and we're able to watch him from behind as he slowly saunters across the lawn to cool off. It's one of the few moments where Wells allows a performer to do something other than stand and deliver their lines.

What results from this approach is a prestigious piece of diva-at-twilight kitsch, rightly categorised as a comedy by the Golden Globes, and never funnier than when it tries to be serious. **S**



Rider on the storm: Lance Armstrong

behind Armstrong's ferociously doomed arrogance. Perhaps a fictional context is the place to do that, and at the risk of retreading already well-covered ground, Stephen Frears is currently filming an as yet untitled Armstrong biopic with suitably intense Ben Foster in the lead. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Frank Marshall
Matt Tolmach
Alex Gibney
Written by
Alex Gibney
Director of Photography
Maryse Alberti
Edited by
Andy Grieve
Tim Squyres
Lindy Jankura
Music
David Kahne
Supervising

Sound Editor
Al Zaleski
@Sprocket Productions, Inc. Production Companies
Sony Pictures Classics presents a Kennedy/Marshall production in association with Jigsaw Productions and Matt Tolmach Productions
An Alex Gibney film

narrator
Alex Gibney
Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]
Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing
11,115 ft +0 frames

After seven-times Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong admits in a TV interview with Oprah Winfrey to doping throughout his cycling career, documentarist Alex Gibney returns to an aborted project in which he followed the cyclist's progress during his 2009 'comeback' Tour. At that time, Gibney had no inkling that Armstrong was using performance-enhancing drugs.

Driven by the sense that Armstrong owes him an explanation, the director conducts further interviews with the now disgraced rider. He also uses archive footage to trace the cyclist's seemingly remarkable feat of beating testicular cancer and then going on to a record number of consecutive Tour victories. Testimony from former colleagues sheds light on the culture of doping, which was endemic in the sport due to inadequate testing, suggesting that Armstrong was far from the only guilty rider yet exceptional in his bullish denials and bullying tactics towards journalists and fellow riders. With his reputation destroyed, Armstrong faces an uncertain future but shows scant remorse.

The final analysis is that the public preferred to believe a beautiful lie rather than accept the ugly truth.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Steve Traxler
Jean Doumanian
George Clooney
Grant Heslov
Screenplay
Tracy Letts
Based on his play
Director of Photography
Adriano Goldman
Edited by
Stephen Mirrione
Production Designer
David Gropman
Music
Gustavo Santaolalla
Sound Mixer
Drew Kunin
Costume Designer
Cindy Evans

@[TBC]
Production Companies
The Weinstein Company presents a Jean Doumanian/Smokehouse Pictures production in association with Battle Mountain Films and Yuccaipa Films
Executive Producers

Jeffrey Richards
Jerry Frankel
Ron Burkle
Claire Rudnick
Polstein
Celia Costas
Bob Weinstein
Harvey Weinstein

Cast
Meryl Streep
Violet Weston
Julia Roberts
Barbara Weston
Ewan McGregor
Bill Fordham
Chris Cooper
Charles Aiken
Abigail Breslin
Jean Fordham
Benedict Cumberbatch
Little Charles Aiken
Juliette Lewis
Karen Weston
Margo Martindale
Mattie Fae Aiken
Dermot Mulroney
Steve
Julianne Nicholson
Ivy Weston
Sam Shepard
Beverly Weston

Misty Upham
Johnna

Dolby Digital/ Datasat In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

10,873 ft +8 frames

Pawhuska, Oklahoma, present day. Weston family patriarch Beverly, a drunken poet approaching his fourth decade of writer's block, disappears from his home, leaving his pill-popping, cancer-stricken wife Violet to fend for herself. Hearing this news, various family members descend on the Weston home: Violet and Beverly's daughters Barbara, Karen and Ivy; Barbara's estranged husband Bill and their teenaged daughter Jean; Karen's fiancé Steve, a real-estate salesman; and Violet's sister Mattie Fae and her husband Charles.

Beverly's body is dredged up from a nearby lake. Shortly after the funeral, Mattie Fae and Charles's slow son Little Charles arrives in town. Over the supper table that evening, a pill-addled Violet becomes mean, deliberately bringing up the subject of Barbara's marital troubles. Barbara retaliates by leading a raid on Violet's store of pharmaceuticals, forcing her to clean up. An emboldened Ivy reveals that she has begun a clandestine relationship with her 'cousin' Little Charles, whom Barbara learns is actually their brother by way of an affair between Beverly and Mattie Fae. Steve makes advances towards Jean, prompting Bill to return to Denver with his daughter, officially making his separation from Barbara permanent. Barbara is left alone with her mother, whom she learns may have had foreknowledge of Beverly's plans to commit suicide. Barbara leaves, heading off in her pickup truck in the direction of Denver.

The Best Man Holiday

Director: Malcolm D. Lee
Certificate 15 123m 6s

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Writer-director Malcolm D. Lee's belated sequel to his 1999 sleeper hit *The Best Man* reunites the first film's cast and crew for another round of interpersonal relations among a tight-knit group of well-heeled friends. The action is still compressed into a restricted chronological setting for optimum dramatic effect, but instead of a wedding – as the grammatically irksome title hints – it's the Christmas holiday period: the perfect context for the film's blend of good-natured humour, treachery mawkishness and ultimately overbearing Christian sentiment.

The de facto lead is cash-strapped author Harper Stewart (a charismatic Taye Diggs), who, egged on by his devious agent, embarks on a Machiavellian quest to gather information about his estranged friend, New York Giants pro Lance (Morris Chestnut), so that he can secretly ghost-write his no doubt lucrative autobiography. This craven act of exploitation is a surprisingly dark narrative launchpad, but Lee isn't as interested in digging into the depths of human betrayal as in portraying a seductively picture-book portrait of high-end lifestyles. Harper, for example, may allegedly be broke but his knitwear collection looks like it cost more than the average car. Greg Gardiner's fluid, crystalline camerawork underlines the absurdly attractive characters' environs in all their haute beauty.

With its multi-stranded narrative focused on mostly rote workings-out of personal relationships (with a terminal illness thrown in for good measure), *The Best Man Holiday* is content to play it safe. Only Harper and Lance's troubled bromance storyline really captures the attention for any length of time, though things come to life in a few less predictable moments. A subplot tracking the relationship between workaholic Jordan (Nia Long) and her caring white boyfriend Brian (Eddie Cibrian) strikes a subtle, heartening blow for the positive representation



Only God forgives: Diggs, Chestnut, Calhoun

of interracial relationships in mainstream cinema. Elsewhere, the excellent Terence Howard's sleazy horndog Quentin is deployed as something of a one-man Greek chorus: a comic signifier of the writer-director's refreshing self-awareness, whose presence helps the film to avoid the type of myopic smugness that blighted Judd Apatow's comparable *This Is 40* (2012).

Alas, such self-reflexivity vaporises before an overegged final act that packs in everything from childbirth to last-minute American football touchdowns under cover of the dubious propagation of Christian morality. (There's something unsettling about a dying wife urging her husband to go and play football because that's what God would want.) Yet the talented, likeable cast manage to sell the schmaltz, the characters feel warm and relatable, and who can blame Lee for trying to please everybody? The film was a huge box-office success in America, drawing a diverse audience, and preparations for a third film in the series are reportedly already under way. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Sean Daniel
Malcolm D. Lee

Written by

Malcolm D. Lee
Based on characters
created by
Malcolm D. Lee

Director of

Photography
Greg Gardiner

Editor

Paul Millsbaugh

Production Designer

Keith Brian Burns

Music

Stanley Clarke

Sound Mixer

Glen Gauthier

Costume Designer

Danielle Hollowell

©[TBC]

Production

Companies

Universal Pictures

presents a

Blackmailed/Sean

Daniel Company

production

A Malcolm D. Lee film

Executive Producer

Preston Holmes

Cast

Morris Chestnut

Lance

Taye Diggs

Harper Stewart

Regina Hall

Candace, 'Candy'

Terrence Howard

Quentin

Sanaa Lathan

Robyn Stewart

Nia Long

Jordan

Harold Perrineau

Julian Murch

Monica Calhoun

Mia Sullivan

Melissa De Sousa

Shelby

Eddie Cibrian

Brian

Dolby Digital/SDDS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Universal Pictures

International

UK & Eire

11,079 ft +0 frames

US, the present. Mia Sullivan invites her old friend Robin Stewart and husband Harper to her house for the Christmas break. Robin is pregnant; Harper, an author, is having financial difficulties. Mia's husband Lance, a professional footballer for the New York Giants, holds a grudge against Harper for sleeping with Mia in college. Harper is persuaded by his agent to secretly gather information on Lance in order to ghostwrite an autobiography.

The other guests spending Christmas at Mia and Lance's house are Quentin and Shelby; career woman Jordan and her boyfriend Brian; and Julian and Candace. The latter run a private school for at-risk kids but one of their key investors has withdrawn backing following the appearance on YouTube of footage of Candace's stripping past. Mia reveals to Harper that she has cancer, and implores him to repair his friendship

with Lance. Jordan agrees to help Harper with his book about Lance, and has her company design a mock-up cover. Julian questions Candace about the details of her past and they fight. Candace and Shelby argue, and Candace storms out of the house. On Christmas Eve, Lance is furious to see the cover of his autobiography on Jordan's iPad. He tells Harper to leave, though they soon patch things up. Julian and Candace also reconcile. On Christmas Day, Mia – whose condition is worsening rapidly – implores a reluctant Lance to play his final Giants game before retirement. He does so, and breaks the team's all-time yards record.

Soon afterwards, the friends gather for Mia's funeral. A repentant Shelby gives Julian the money he and Candace need for their school. Robin gives birth to a baby girl named Mia. Ten months later, Lance's autobiography is published.

Black Nativity

USA/United Kingdom/Australia 2013

Director: Kasi Lemmons

Certificate PG 92m 44s

Reviewed by Patrick Fahy

An urban festive film involving eviction, bribery, family dysfunction, underage pregnancy and armed robbery, *Black Nativity* may sound like a very bleak midwinter but it proves an unexpected, uplifting treat, dispelling the idea that Christmas musicals need Bing Crosby in a Santa hat or Albert Finney crowing painful Leslie Bricusse rhymes. Written and directed by Kasi Lemmons (better known for acting, but whose *Eve's Bayou* and *Talk to Me* won indie plaudits), it builds liberally on Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes's 1961 off-Broadway gospel show of the same name. Staging Hughes's 'Black Nativity' pageant as the background for her film's climax, Lemmons constructs a simple, compelling tale of disadvantaged teenager Langston, whose enforced Christmas stay with the grandparents he's never met (Harlem preacher Cornell Cobbs and wife Aretha) leads to the resolving of a longstanding family rift. If the social concern and heavy plot contrivances suggest shades of Dickens, so too does the film's conviction that open hearts and second chances mend many woes.

Those who dislike musicals will have plenty to squirm and titter at as characters belt out their thoughts, or quote Hughes's poetry, in otherwise realistic settings. Others, though, will appreciate the film's expressive mix of soul, rap, R&B and carols. Many musical numbers are accounted for as dreams or imaginings, which affords temporary licence to unite disparate characters with assorted takes on a theme (especially effective in 'He Loves Me Still', begun beautifully by Angela Bassett's Aretha, sitting alone at the piano).

Lemmons finds powerful moments in small touches – a wobble in Aretha's voice when she suggests that Langston might call her 'grandma', or Cobbs's excited disbelief on unexpectedly hearing, for the first time in 16 years, his estranged daughter's voice. Jacob Latimore is excellent as troubled Langston, his eyes half-dead through lack of expectation but sparking alive at discoveries or novelties. When Aretha unceremoniously makes him open his Christmas present early because he needs the smart clothes inside to wear to church, his eyes flash with momentary awe that such an extravagant treasure could be meant for him.

"I'd rather be a lamppost in Harlem than the governor of Georgia," Cobbs quotes from Hughes, and you sense that Lemmons concurs, so vividly do her elegant exterior shots capture the bracing, menacing hustle and zing of city life; her street scenes feel so true to life that you look vainly for extras peering at the camera. Kristi Zea's production design offers dazzling detail, from the contents of Cobbs's desk to the transformation (in Langston's dreamt Nativity scene) of Times Square into a surrogate Holy Land, with a down-and-out hovel as the stable, digital hoardings showing camels, and a poster of a foxy, monochrome woman draped over the big red title 'Gomorrah', amusingly spoofing the ubiquitous ads for the show *Chicago*.

It's unusually reverent for a Hollywood film, with lyrics invoking the celebration of the birth of Christ and a warm portrayal of the parish's Christmas service, alive with all the

welcome and spontaneity of gospel worship. Though it could use a few more laughs, *Black Nativity* is taut, heartfelt and moving. With an understanding of human fallibility and regret, and its message that healing is within everyone's grasp, it's one of the best Christmas films in years – even if it is unlikely to convert those who don't relate to musicals. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Celine Rattray William Horberg Galt Niederhoffer Written for the screen by Kasi Lemmons Based upon the play by Langston Hughes Director of Photography Anastas Michos Edited by Terilyn A. Shropshire Production Designer Kristi Zea Original Score Raphael Saadiq Laura Karpman Sound Mixer William Sarokin Costume Designer Gersha Phillips Choreographer Otis Salldi ©Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC (in all territories except Brazil, Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain) ©TCF Hungary Film Rights Exploitation Limited Liability Company, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC (in Brazil, Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain) Production Companies Fox Searchlight Pictures presents a Maven Pictures/	Wonderful Films production Made in association with TSG Entertainment and Ingenious Media Produced in association with Big Screen Productions Executive Producers Trudie Styler T.D. Jakes Joy Goodwin Derrick M. Williams Cast Forest Whitaker Reverend Cornell Cobbs Angela Bassett Aretha Cobbs Tyrese Gibson Tyson, 'Loot' Mary J. Blige Angel Jacob Latimore Langston Cobbs Nasir Jones Isaiah, street prophet Vondie Curtis Hall pawnbroker Jennifer Hudson Naima Cobbs Luke James Jo-Jo/ Joseph in dream Grace Gibson Maria/Mary in dream Rotimi Officer Butch McDaniels J. Mallory McCree Kyle H. Hunter Hall Snoopy Dolby Digital/	Datasat/SDDS In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK) 8,346 ft +0 frames
--	--	--

Baltimore, present day. Facing eviction in Christmas week, Naima sends her teenage son Langston to Harlem to stay with her parents, Reverend Cobbs and wife Aretha, from whom she's estranged. Arriving in New York, Langston is wrongly arrested; at the police station he meets enigmatic criminal Tyson. Langston's grandparents welcome him to their well-appointed home, but won't explain their rift with Naima. Unhappy, Langston rings his mother, asking her to take him home. He tries to get money for his mother by stealing from his grandfather, but is caught out. He reluctantly attends the parish Christmas Eve pageant, 'Black Nativity'. During the pageant, he dozes and dreams of the nativity story set in New York and peopled by the parishioners. Langston leaves the service to rob a shop where Tyson works, but Tyson reveals that he is Langston's father. Langston brings Tyson to the church, where they find Naima. Reverend Cobbs interrupts the service to admit that when Naima fell pregnant at 15, he bribed Tyson, who then was becoming involved in crime, to abandon her. Naima is furious, but Langston persuades her to stay. They all forgive each other and celebrate Christmas.

The Book Thief

USA/United Kingdom 2013

Director: Brian Percival

Certificate 12A 130m 49s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

When Jewish teenager Max, fleeing Nazi officials in Munich, turns up on the doorstep of working-class Hans and Rosa Hubermann, they rush him inside without a moment's hesitation. Only later does doubt set in for Rosa, but her usually biddable husband, suddenly firm, argues the case for their duty of care: "We've always known that one day this might happen."

Hans's assertion – implying prescient intelligence – comes as some surprise in a film that otherwise represents the couple as swayed hither and thither, ignorant and innocent of the ramifications of the rise of fascism in their country, and is an insubstantial insight into the thoughts and intuitions of the non-Jewish German of this period. A more complete exploration of the couple's perspective might have helped differentiate *The Book Thief* from other recent films (*The Reader*, about a young boy's relationship with a female death-camp guard; *Sarah's Key*, about a Jewish girl's experiences during the occupation of Paris) that have similarly sifted a historical timeline through a single, youthful point of view.

Instead, this adaptation of Markus Zusak's popular 2006 novel from *Downton Abbey* director Brian Percival and screenwriter Michael Petroni is non-confrontational and pappy in regard to history, pouring its heart into its central protagonist Liesel Meminger, the nine-year-old girl recently adopted by Hans and Rosa. Illiterate but highly inquisitive, she's taught to read by Hans and encouraged in her love of books by Max, in hiding in the Hubermann basement. Fetching pressed shirts for the village mayor, Liesel is taken under the wing of his wife Ilsa, who gives her access to her library. Liesel later steals from the library to read a febrile Max back to consciousness.

In all her intentness, Liesel can't see that the new friends she depends on in fact depend more on her: her temerity and determination to live – and to live a fuller life through language – are like liniment to her elders. They see a world



Speaking volumes: Sophie Nélisse

imploding; she shakes the world for what it's worth. And we can believe that she pleases them, because actress Sophie Nélisse gives a terrifically restrained and responsive performance as Liesel. Watching today's child actors can sometimes feel like an exercise in mercifully shading one's eyes, as they palm a learnt personality on to a scene and cause a more experienced co-star to look as if they're playing to a green screen. Not here. With her large eyes and soft, full face, powdered under plaster dust at the film's tragic climax, Nélisse could be mistaken for silent star Mary Pickford, and promises the assurance and accomplishment to match.

But even she can't justify the gratuitous way the film abridges the persecution of Jewish Germans for context. Percival's direction lacks provocation and seals in the prettifying set design: the book-burning looks toasty as a hearthside, and a cut to Kristallnacht is crassly identifiable by titbit textbook clues, smashed windows and coshes. Moreover the narration by Death (voiced by Roger Allam) is a miscalculation. It may have worked in the book, with expanse enough to develop the character, but what is sympathetic on the page is pared to nondescript on screen. In small infrequent doses, it's an unforgiving pullback from the focal characters, making us mistrustful of our affection for them. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Karen Rosenfelt Ken Blancato Screenplay Michael Petroni Based upon the novel by Markus Zusak Director of Photography Florian Ballhaus Film Editor John Wilson Production Designer Simon Elliott Music John Williams	Production Sound Mixer Manfred Banach Costume Designer Anna B. Sheppard ©Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC (in all territories except Brazil, Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain) ©TCF Hungary Film Rights Exploitation	Limited Liability Company, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC (in Brazil, Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain) Production Companies Fox 2000 Pictures presents a Sunswet Entertainment production Made in association with TSG	Entertainment and The Blair Partnership In association with Studio Babelsberg Produced in association with Ingenious Media Executive Producer Redmond Morris Cast Geoffrey Rush Hans Hubermann Emily Watson Rosa Hubermann	Sophie Nélisse Liesel Meminger Ben Schnetzer Max Nico Liersch Rudy Roger Allam narrator/Death Heike Makatsch Liesel's mother Julian Lehmann Liesel's brother Barbara Auer Ilsa Hermann Dolby Digital/	Datasat/SDDS In Colour Prints by Deluxe [2.35:1] Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK) 11,773ft +8 frames
--	--	--	---	---	---

Munich, 1938. Nine-year-old Liesel and her brother are given up for adoption by their mother. While journeying to their foster parents, Liesel's brother dies. At his funeral, Liesel picks up a book and keeps it to remind her of him, though she cannot read. At the home of her new foster parents, Hans and Rosa Hubermann, Liesel makes friends with neighbour Rudy. She warms to Hans more than to flinty Rosa. Hans teaches her to read, painting a wall-to-wall dictionary in the basement. Jewish teenager Max evades a round-up by Nazi officials, and is sheltered by the

Hubermanns. Liesel and Max become like brother and sister. Running errands to the mayor's house, Liesel is befriended by his wife Ilsa, who lets her use their late son's library. When Liesel loses the job and Max falls sick, she steals books from the library to read to him. Concerned for the family's safety, Max leaves the Hubermanns' home. Liesel begins writing her own book. Allied planes bomb the neighbourhood, killing Rosa, Hans and Rudy. Ilsa escorts Liesel from the rubble.

At the end of the war, Liesel is reunited with Max. She grows up to be an author.

Bullett Raja

Director: Tigmanshu Dhulia
Certificate 15 135m 27s

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

In 1975, Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan teamed up with the actor Dharmendra on the blockbuster bromance *Sholay*. Later he appeared alongside Shashi Kapoor in other bromances – *Suhaag* (1979), *Shaan* (1980) and *Namak Halaal* (1982) – in which Kapoor played second fiddle to Bachchan. Director Tigmanshu Dhulia duly references both *Sholay* and Kapoor in *Bullett Raja*, which is a throwback to those movies. Here, the romancing brothers-in-arms are Raja and Rudra, who become firm friends over pegs of whisky at a wedding while an 'item girl' lip-syncs to a raunchy song as a bevy of dancing beauties perform pelvic thrusts.

The northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh is a morass of corruption and caste politics, and it is against this backdrop that Raja and Rudra, described as "political commandos" by one of their politician mentors, flourish. They rise to the top of the criminal hierarchy in a hail of bullets and more often than not on a Royal Enfield Bullet motorcycle, hence the film's title. The extra 't' is probably there for superstitious reasons, since in Bollywood the addition of a letter supposedly brings miraculous box-office success.

Unfortunately, after a wonderful first act in which the lead pair's rise is contrasted with the labyrinthine workings of the state machinery, the film swiftly descends into the realm of crude revenge drama. The bromance is interrupted for long stretches by romantic interludes between Raja and wannabe actress Mitali, and Dhulia delves confusingly into unnecessary subplots that derail the central narrative and throw the pacing off. This is a trait of the director's films: both his best works, such as *Haasil* (2003) and *Paan Singh Tomar* (2012), and mediocre offerings like *Charas* (2004) and *Sahib Biwi Aur Gangster Returns* (2013), suffer from the same kind of unevenness.

It doesn't help that Saif Ali Khan is miscast in the central Bachchan-like role of Raja. In his pomp, Bachchan brought fiery intensity to even the most pedestrian roles. Here, the 43-year-old Khan looks far too old to be an unemployed recent graduate, and seems disinterested in the proceedings for the most part. Jimmy Shergill



Vengeance is fine: Saif Ali Khan

tries gamely as his Kapoor-like mate Rudra, and his sincerity shows on screen. A successful leading man in the Punjabi-language film industry, Shergill has made a career out of playing supporting roles in Bollywood and here outshines Khan in every scene they have together.

The biggest culprit, in what is supposed to be a mainstream Bollywood movie, is the choreography. The action-packed nature of the film demands a bullet-ballet aesthetic but Dhulia never achieves the levels of slickness that current Bollywood audiences have become used to. Similarly, the dance choreography is lacklustre for an audience weaned on spectacle, with Khan lumbering around rather than being limber. Perhaps Dhulia should have focused on a decent script and getting a performance from his leading man rather than adding the extra 't' to the title. It hasn't worked anyway, since the film has not done well at the Indian box office. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Rahul Mittra
Nitin Tej Ahuja
Tigmanshu Dhulia
Screenplay
Tigmanshu Dhulia
Animesh Dhulia
Cinematography
P.S. Vinod
Editor
Rahul Srivastava

Art Director
Dhananjay Mondal
Music
Sajid-Wajid
Sound
Rakesh Ranjan
Costumes
Priyanka Mundada
Choreographers
Ganesh Acharya
Brinda

©[TBC]
Production Companies
Fox Star Studios
presents a
Brandsmith Motion
Pictures and Moving
Pictures production
A film by Tigmanshu
Dhulia

Cast
Saif Ali Khan
Raja Mishra
Sonakshi Sinha
Mitali
Jimmy Shergill
Rudra Tripathi
Viduyt Jammwal
Inspector Arun
Singh Munna
Mahi Gill
dancer

Chunky Pandey
Lallan
Ravi Kishan
Sumner Yadav
Gulshan Grover
Bajaj
Raj Babbar
Minister Ram
Babu Shukla
Vineet Sharma
Shrivastva

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles
Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)
12,190 ft +8 frames

Lucknow, India, the present. Best friends Raja and Rudra become embroiled in a feud between Rudra's family and the state's leading opium grower. Their ability to handle themselves in difficult situations brings them to the notice of a leading politician, who takes them on as his hired guns. Raja becomes an icon for Hindu and Muslim youth alike. During a mission to kidnap shady financial backer Bajaj, Raja meets aspiring actress Mitali and they fall in love. Bajaj wreaks revenge for his kidnapping by

having Rudra killed. Raja goes on a revenge rampage and kills Bajaj, then goes after the assassin who killed Rudra. Policeman Munna is given the task of eliminating Raja. However, Raja secretly meets Munna and reveals that police and politicians are planning to blame Munna for the riots that will inevitably erupt when Raja's young supporters learn of his death. Munna stages a fake shootout and the world believes that Raja is dead. Raja, Munna and Mitali escape to Malaysia to begin new lives.

Crystal Fairy & the Magical Cactus and 2012

Director: Sebastián Silva

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

We've seen it all before: the twentysomethings on a fabled road trip to locate a drug that will open up new vistas and experiences and afford some degree of self-discovery; the American indifferent to the language, culture and traditions of the southern part of the continent (in this case Chile) apart from the access it provides to cheap and/or exotic drugs; the diametrically opposed personalities who initially reject each other, only to end up complementing one another perfectly.

This new film from Chilean director Sebastián Silva, best known to UK audiences for his pointedly observed social satire *The Maid* (2009), stars Michael Cera as Jamie, a rude, selfish American. Drunk at a party, he invites Crystal Fairy (Gaby Hoffmann), a seemingly eccentric fruitcake also from the north of the continent, to accompany him and his three Chilean friends on a road trip. Their objective: to 'trip' on the mescaline-like substance produced by a cactus called San Pedro.

Silva's film, far from cleaving to a rites-of-passage/buddy-film formula (of which many examples abound, from *Stand by Me* to *American Pie* and *The Hangover*), plays like an object lesson in understatement and deadpan humour, and evinces a warm, tolerant understanding of other people's annoying 'defects' and the way these can shape and determine relationships. What happens in the plot is, in many ways, obvious, but it is *how* it happens that makes the characters fully relatable and draws the viewer in close. The resulting film is, like its eponymous character, generally unpredictable beneath its apparent predictability – not



Desert bloom: Michael Cera

Delivery Man

USA 2013
Director: Ken Scott
Certificate 12A 104m 29s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

With *Delivery Man*, a US version of his genial, soft-centred French-Canadian sperm-donor comedy *Starbuck* (2011), director Ken Scott enters that small club of second-time-around directors (including Hitchcock, Haneke, Sluizer and Shimizu) who've parlayed a foreign hit into a Hollywood remake. However, since the *Starbuck* trailer contains scenes and dialogue that appear uncannily similar to the remake, Scott's guiding principle seems to have been 'if it ain't broke don't fix it'. Visually, the film remains what one might charitably call performance-centred, retaining a distinctly televisual look despite its bigger budget.

Inspired by news reports and perhaps by the dad-discovering documentary *Donor Unknown* (2010), this tale of a feckless fortyish slacker, who 20 years earlier donated sperm under the name 'Starbuck' and whose legion offspring are now suing to uncover his identity, would seem a high-concept comic match for Vince Vaughn's super-slacker persona. But its soggy mix of sentimentality and broad, gag-driven comedy soon palls. A late entry in a cinema strand fascinated by how hi-tech fertility varies the family template, it lacks the essential curiosity about donor relationships that drives *The Switch* or *The Kids Are All Right*. Even though it features a court case that directly supports donor anonymity over children's rights, it never engages with the issues beyond their comic possibilities.

Instead it stays firmly in Apatown, that territory where adolescent males explore fear of fatherhood. Its terrors are incarnated here by Chris Pratt's emasculated lawyer Brett, a man so ground down by marauding children that he'll say anything in their hearing, including "My kids know they're too old to be aborted." Whatever happened to that useful *Old School* cover-your-ears parental command: "Earmuffs"? Or to mothers, curiously absent in this dad-fest except in the scolding, eye-rolling appearances of Cobie Smulders as the hero's reluctantly pregnant girlfriend.

When Vaughn's goodhearted donor-dad David elects to be an anonymous 'guardian angel' to his



Harried with children: Smulders, Vaughn

cohort of kids, the film lurches into a solipsistic sappiness that curdles its comic aims. There's a memorable misfire when David agonises over signing a hospital release for a drug-overdosing daughter and the perky music soundtrack suggests hilarity. Another faintly queasy moment is the 'Starbuck Kids Camp', which resembles a Coke commercial until you remember that all the cute teens are consanguineous, making it basically a cook-out with incest-taboos. The film is as overcrowded as the campsite, filled with innumerable child-protecting plots that are either gags or abruptly abandoned. And why include a glancing mob-debt plot that seems shoehorned in and then magically solved with parental money?

Just one sweet note registers, as David wrestles with the locked-in life of his severely handicapped offspring Ryan (played by actor Sebastian Rene, the one cast member held over from *Starbuck*). Vaughn's damped-down discomfort is finely done, in quite a different league from the rest of the film. It's a moment that makes you wonder if, Bruce Willis-style, he might eventually create a parallel career as an understated character actor. But here he gracefully cedes the role of standout comedy player to the grandstanding Pratt, gleefully spouting the unsayable truths about fatherhood ("Kids are a black hole – they suck away your money") that the film can only bear to flag up rather than open up. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Juan de Dios Larrain Pablo Larrain	Production Companies Fabula in association with Dironiro present	José Miguel Silva Lel
Written by Sebastián Silva	Executive Producers Mariane Hartard Juan Ignacio Correa Andrea Carrasco	Sebastián Silva Lobo
Director of Photography Cristián Petit-Laurent	Producers Stuven Sebastian Silva Sofia Subercaseaux	Manuela Baldovino the girl who is high on life
Editing Sebastián Silva Sofia Subercaseaux Diego Macho		Daniel Riveros Gepe
Art Direction Mark Grattan	Cast Michael Cera Jamie	Gracia Ariztia the other crazy dancing girl
Original Music Pedro Subercaseaux	Gaby Hoffmann Crystal Fairy	Esteban Carreño Botota
Production Sound Mixer Alex Woodroff	Juan Andrés Silva Champa	Juan Lara Hanna
Costume Design Mark Grattan	Augustin Silva Pilo	In Colour [2.35:1]
		Subtitles
		Distributor Content Film

Chile, the present. Jamie, an obnoxious twentysomething American, plans a trip to the north of Chile with three Chilean friends to sample San Pedro cactus, reputed to be hallucinogenic. At a house party the night before their departure, a drunk Jamie meets Crystal Fairy, a young American of mystical bent, who joins them the next day on their trip. Arriving in the north, they steal a piece of San Pedro cactus from a lonely old lady. Jamie and his friends head to the desert and cook the magical cactus at night. After they drink the liquid it produces the next morning, Jamie is rude to Crystal Fairy, so she spends the day on her own strolling around. At one point she undresses, but gets lost and has to borrow a T-shirt from a fellow American passing by in a car. When he offers to give her a lift she tells him her real name, Isabel. Meanwhile Jamie seems to be the only one hallucinating as he hangs around with his friends, and feels increasingly guilty for having shouted at Crystal Fairy. He desperately searches for her. When she finally reappears, they all gather around the fire. Crystal Fairy reveals that she was gang-raped when she was 17. They all hug her and Jamie starts crying.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by André Rouleau	and Reliance Entertainment present an André Rouleau production	Dolby Digital/ DTS/SDDS In Colour Prints by DeLuxe [2.35:1]
Written for the Screen by Ken Scott	Executive Producers Ray Angelic Scott Mednick Mark Sourian	Distributor E1 Films
Based on the original screenplay Starbuck written by Ken Scott and Martin Petit		9,403 ft +8 frames
Director of Photography Eric Edwards	Cast Vince Vaughn David Wozniak	
Editor Priscilla Nedd Friendly	Chris Pratt Brett	
Production Designer Ida Random	Cobie Smulders Emma	
Music Jon Brion	Britt Robertson Kristen	
Re-recording Mixers Scott Millan	Dave Patten Adam	
Greg P. Russell	Adam Chanler-Berat Viggo	
Costume Designer Melissa Toth	Jack Reynor Josh	
	Simon Delaney Victor Wozniak	
	Andrzej Blumenfeld Mikolaj Wozniak	
©Dreamworks II Distribution Co., LLC		
Production Companies Dreamworks Pictures		

Brooklyn, present day. Fortyish slacker David owes mobsters \$80,000. His fecklessness makes his pregnant girlfriend Emma choose to be a single mother. He discovers that his sperm donations as 'Starbuck' in 1994 have resulted in 533 adult children, 142 of whom are now going to court to discover his identity. Deciding to watch over them as a 'guardian angel', he helps out an overdosing junkie daughter, a self-involved actor son and a severely handicapped son, among others. He joins a Starbuck reunion anonymously. Thugs try to drown David, and then his father, in a bath in an attempt to recover the debt. David's inept lawyer Brett persuades him to counter-sue the clinic for damaging his anonymity. The case receives massive media coverage. Brett wins, claiming that without anonymity the children would not exist, and David is awarded \$200,000. When David confesses that he is Starbuck, his father offers him \$100,000 for his share of the family meat business. With his debt paid, David reveals himself on the Starbuck Facebook page, forfeiting the court award. Emma goes into premature labour but the baby is born healthy; 142 of David's children come to the hospital. David proposes to Emma and admits that he is Starbuck. David introduces himself to all his children in turn.

Getaway

Director: Courtney Solomon
Certificate 12A 89m 57s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

Had *Getaway* been released 50 years ago, it's not hard to imagine it slotting in fairly comfortably in the down-and-dirty roster of a stable like American International Pictures. A washed-up racing driver turned public enemy, a supercharged muscle car, characters called 'the Voice' and 'the Kid' – Courtney Solomon's movie certainly aspires to a cache of low-budget genre cool. In fact at times it actually recalls, in its prickly dynamic between car-bound outlaw protagonist and reluctant hostage/sidekick, one of the very first AIP productions, 1955's *The Fast and the Furious*. Of course, that film's title rights were eventually bought for one of today's most enduring action franchises, the vehicular pyrotechnics of which undeniably inform the relentless pile-ups on show here. *Getaway*, though, while impossibly fast and crammed with fury, is a slack-jawed, numbing spectacle. Edited to within an inch of its life, it still feels bereft of any real adrenaline rush. Worse still, there's little or no sense of true jeopardy in its grinding repetitions, leading a potentially spiky B-flick scenario to quickly become deathly dull.

Ethan Hawke looks suitably glum as Brent Magna, a former rally champ who has decamped to Sofia after dabbling in the underworld with getaway jobs. When anonymous villain Jon Voight (restricted, until the final seconds, to close-ups of his mouth) kidnaps his wife, Magna is forced to complete a cycle of increasingly dangerous and illegal stunts in order to secure her freedom, starting with the theft of a customised, armoured Shelby Mustang that's been rigged up with multiple spy cameras. Solomon makes doubly sure we don't forget this latter aspect, seizing the chance to fidget interminably between viewpoints. Voight's bizarre requests – use the car to wreck a downtown Christmas market, crash into a water truck, disable a power plant – initially intrigue for their seemingly wanton nature, but the ensuing pursuits and escapes from hapless, somersaulting police cars grow tiresome fast. As Magna completes 'levels' on a



Fast and spurious: Selena Gomez, Ethan Hawke

curve of difficulty, it's as enervating as watching someone else playing videogames. Solomon only pauses to pad out an already overlong 90 minutes by having Magna incessantly replay the imagined scene of his wife's abduction.

The arrival of Selena Gomez, as a singularly unconvincing cyber-hacker who tags along with Magna after trying to reclaim her stolen car, briefly stirs the tedium. But the frosty banter is asinine and thereafter the script chucks in ever more ludicrous contrivances. The overall lack of effect is encapsulated in the countless action sequences, which are frenetically cut to the point of abstraction: each one is utterly anticlimactic, such is the complete indifference to building tension. The lone anomaly is a pursuit that utilises a sleek, static tracking shot, filmed subjectively from Magna's viewpoint. This scene, occurring very late in the movie, lasts for around two minutes and manages for once to generate a smidgen of suspense. At the same time, it too nods to another type of videogame aesthetic, the first-person racing game. But after the barrage of what has come before, it feels almost like an infiltration from slow cinema. Frenzied but drained of genuine thrills, *Getaway* is action filmmaking at its most pedestrian. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Allan Zeman
Moshe Diamant
Christopher Milburn
Courtney Solomon
Written by
Sean Finegan
Gregg Maxwell Parker
Director of Photography
Yaron Levy
Editor
Ryan Dufrene
Production Designer
Nate Jones
Music
Justin Burnett
Sound Mixer
Emil Evtimov
Costume Designer
Roseanne Fiedler

an After Dark
Films production
in association
with Signature
Entertainment,
Silver Reel
A film by Courtney
Solomon
Executive Producers
Julius R. Nasso
Wayne Marc Godfrey
Robert Jones
Bobby Ranghelov
John Goodman
Dennis L. Pelino
Claudia Bluemhuber
Ian Hutchinson
Joel Silver
Steve Richards

Cast

Ethan Hawke
Brent Magna
Selena Gomez
the Kid
Jon Voight
the voice
Rebecca Budig

Leanne
Bruce Payne
distinguished man
Paul Freeman
the man
Ivailo Geraskov
detective

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

8,095 ft +8 frames

Sofia, Bulgaria, present day. Former racing driver Brent Magna learns from an anonymous caller – known only as 'the Voice' – that his wife Leanne has been kidnapped and that he must perform a series of tasks to secure her release. The Voice orders Brent to steal an armoured Shelby Mustang, warning him that Leanne will die if he is caught. Brent is instructed to speed through crowded urban centres, leaving chaos and destruction in his wake while evading the pursuing police. A young woman, 'the Kid', attempts to steal the car, claiming that she owns it. She stays with Brent when they are pursued once more. Brent is ordered by the Voice to rob a bank that's owned by the Kid's father. When the Kid declares that the bank has no physical funds, Brent realises he has been used to distract police from a separate heist, for which he and the Kid will be framed. Brent intercepts the Voice's men, snatching the bank's hard drives, which they had planned to steal. The Voice agrees to trade Leanne for the drives but has his men kidnap the Kid at the handover. With Leanne safe, Brent pursues and rescues the Kid. Her captor, whom Brent assumes to be the Voice, is arrested. However, it's revealed that the real Voice has been orchestrating events remotely from the US.

The Hobbit The Desolation of Smaug

Director: Peter Jackson, Certificate 12A 161m 0s

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

As Arthur C. Clarke observed, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic," and Peter Jackson, adherent of the Méliès model of cinema as realisation of our fantasies (whether inventing a filmmaker in *Forgotten Silver* or the claymation dreams of *Heavenly Creatures*), has found in the work of J.R.R. Tolkien the perfect source for his technological wizardry. Rather than falling into the uncanny valley, *Desolation of Smaug* sets out from it: its conjuration of dragons, sorcerers and elves has an eldritch strangeness, underpinned by its blending of handmade and digital craft, which carries the viewer through some set-piece longueurs.

Viewers initially cavilled at Jackson's adoption of 48fps for *The Hobbit* trilogy, but its issues have been resolved for the second instalment. While last year's *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* felt like a visit to a *Lord of the Rings* theme park, tonally awkward with its farting trolls, this is both enjoyably swifter and morally more serious, as the visual manifestation of antagonists Smaug and the Necromancer raises the stakes. Bilbo's increasing and disturbing attachment to the Ring, which he found at the end of the first film, is paralleled by dwarf leader Thorin Oakenshield's ambivalent motivations in seeking to reclaim his throne. Bard the Bowman, a Robin Hood-like antihero, is a compelling foil to Thorin, similarly seeking to redeem an ancestor's failure.

Two new characters create colour and shade: the elf Tauriel, a supplement to Tolkien's all-male narrative who provides a yoke between subplots as well as a love interest, and the powerfully odd Beorn the Skin-Changer. Gandalf's decision to seek out the Necromancer initiates a crosscutting narrative whose multiple threads add pace and tension to the quest. Thorin's dwarf band, visually similar and single-mindedly focused on their quest, become more engaging through their interactions with these vivid characters.

Similarly, their well-realised homes increase viewer empathy for the dwarves' quest to reclaim Erebor. All that glitters there is not gold: the complicated plot to defeat Smaug sets in motion a smelting operation of Heath Robinson fascination. While Smaug's fire-breathing is given weight and presence equally by Benedict Cumberbatch's line readings and the glow of his thorax, it is the intangible Necromancer (also voiced by Cumberbatch) who is the more chilling threat, an ink-swirl nightmare vision of CGI fluidity in three dimensions. Similarly, Bilbo's hallucinations in Mirkwood, expressed



Dragon's den: Martin Freeman

Inside Llewyn Davis

USA/France/Luxembourg 2012
Directors: Joel Coen, Ethan Coen
Certificate 15 104m 34s

through visual and auditory distortions, testify to the affective power of Jackson's cinema.

While some conventional film elements, such as reverse shots in which an out-of-focus shoulder fills the foreground, struggle in 3D, the medium's capacity is realised by the epic language Jackson developed for *The Lord of the Rings*. Whether helicoptering over landscapes, navigating Weta's model sets or tracking Beorn's bear-to-man transformation, this mobile syntax expands and condenses the viewer's sense of Middle Earth as a coherent and continuous world. Always on the move, like the characters it tracks, the cinematography offers a powerful kinaesthetic inducement to join the journey, one fraught with both the perils and pleasures of magic. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Peter Jackson
Carolynne Cunningham
Zane Weiner
Fran Walsh
Screenplay
Fran Walsh
Philippa Boyens
Peter Jackson
Guillermo del Toro
Based on the novel
[*The Hobbit or There and Back Again*]
by J.R.R. Tolkien

Director of Photography

Andrew Lesnie

Editor

Jabez Olssen

Production Designer

Dan Hennah

Music

Howard Shore

Production Sound Mixer

Tony Johnson

Costume Designers

Bob Buck
Ann Maskrey
Richard Taylor

Visual Effects and Animation

Weta Digital Ltd.

@[TBC]

Production Companies

New Line Cinema
and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures
present a WingNut Films production

Executive Producers

Alan Horn
Toby Emmerich
Ken Kamins
Carolyn Blackwood

Cast

Ian McKellen
Gandalf the Grey
Martin Freeman
Bilbo Baggins
Richard Armitage
Thorin Oakenshield
Benedict Cumberbatch
Smaug/
Necromancer
Evangeline Lilly

Tauriel

Lee Pace
Thranduil

Luke Evans

Bard/Girion

Ken Stott

Balin

James Nesbitt

Bofur

Orlando Bloom

Legolas

Mikael Persbrandt

Beorn

Dolby Digital/

Datasat/SDDS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Some screenings

presented in 3D

Distributor

Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

14,490 ft +0 frames

Thorin Oakenshield, heir to the throne of the lost dwarf kingdom of Erebor, is met by the wizard Gandalf at the Prancing Pony inn. Gandalf persuades Thorin to form a party to retake Erebor, offering to provide a burglar who can steal the Arkenstone that will seal Thorin's kingship.

A year later (following the events of 'The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey'), Thorin's band of dwarves, along with Gandalf and his 'burglar', the hobbit Bilbo Baggins, are en route to Erebor, where they must arrive by Durin's Day. Fleeing Azog the Destroyer, an orc who serves the Necromancer, and aided by Beorn the Skin-Changer, the band reach the haunted Mirkwood. Summoned by elf queen Galadriel, Gandalf departs to locate and confront the Necromancer, leaving the band to flee giant spiders. Captured by the Wood Elves, they are freed by Bilbo, using the Ring's invisibility. They travel downriver and win assistance from Bard the Bowman, descendant of the marksman who fired on Smaug, the dragon who now holds Erebor. Despite a run-in with the Master of Lake-Town, the band proceed – minus the injured Kili – and enter Erebor. Bilbo finds both the Arkenstone and Smaug, but has to be rescued by Thorin. While the dwarves attempt to stop Smaug, the orcs arrive in Lake-Town and are defeated by elves Legolas and Tauriel, who also heals Kili. Both Bard and Gandalf, however, have been imprisoned – by the Master and the Necromancer respectively – and are powerless to stop the ascent of Smaug and the march of the orc army.



The ice strum: Oscar Isaac

Reviewed by J.M. Tyree & Ben Walters

See feature
on page 22

On the grand tour of male failure in the Coen brothers' universe, *Inside Llewyn Davis* occupies an unusual place. *Blood Simple* (1983), *Barton Fink* (1991), *Fargo* (1995), *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001), *The Ladykillers* (2004), *No Country for Old Men* (2007) and *Burn After Reading* (2008) are populated by men who court disaster by grasping after bags of cash or illusory notions of success. The protagonist of *Inside Llewyn Davis* arguably has the opposite problem: his lack of interest in worldly achievement is so pronounced that his life is unravelling into chaos.

Llewyn (the superbly weary Oscar Isaac) is a singer-songwriter navigating the insecure and unprofitable netherworld between art and commerce in the New York folk scene of the early 1960s. After his musical partner Mike commits suicide, Llewyn scrounges an existence passing the hat in Greenwich Village dives, milking a circuit of friends for ad hoc hospitality and seeking affection from fellow musician Jean (Carey Mulligan, short-changed by a shrewish role that belies the Coens' usually rich female characterisation). Llewyn lacks or rejects the slightest entrepreneurial drive: always after a quick buck with no strings, he chooses a day's wages over royalties on a potential novelty hit and turns down an offer to play second fiddle in a market-oriented trio from a serious producer (F. Murray Abraham in a turtleneck playing Bud Grossman – a nod to the legendary Albert Grossman, Bob Dylan's one-time manager). "Do you ever think about the future at all?" Jean asks. "The future?" Llewyn replies. "Like flying cars?"

Less mindfully independent than willfully adrift, Llewyn is a talented but not extraordinary musician who could be in with a shot yet veers between mishap and self-sabotage, spinning his wheels – always crashing on the same couch, as Bowie nearly sang. His awkward squirming

between Mammon and the muse brings to mind Barton Fink's Hollywood career. But, among the Coens' films, *Inside Llewyn Davis* sits most neatly alongside *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000). The films have in common a musical milieu beautifully collated by T Bone Burnett, a hapless hero whose evident shortcomings never quite extinguish our sympathy for him, and explicit references to the *Odyssey* (here including a runaway cat called Ulysses and a Chicago club called the Gate of Horn, based on a historical venue, in which Llewyn's dreams diverge from his reality). But where *O Brother's* picaresque was all sepia, bluegrass, hayseed slapstick and family reunion, this film offers a stringent voyage of overcast skies, melancholy folk, soured relationships and no direction home. Llewyn is a character without rudder or anchor; little wonder that his last-ditch attempt to eke out a living in the Merchant Marine never leaves port.

There's humour here but it's curdled, somewhat in the vein of *A Serious Man* (2008), another pessimistic Coen film about the 1960s; the two stories form a bookended counter-history of a decade whose self-satisfied mythologies are increasingly up for revision. Both pictures specialise in dark laughter about subjects that aren't funny. Yet while *A Serious Man's* Larry Gopnik (Michael Stuhlbarg) is beleaguered by an array of outside forces that invade his life, Llewyn appears bent on engineering traumatic repetitions of his own artistic and emotional low points; he might even be doing himself in. When jazzman Roland Turner (John Goodman, giving a masterclass in obnoxious self-assurance) threatens Llewyn with a curse that will leave him searching for the cause of the pervasive misfortune blighting his life, the gag is that no such hex is necessary.

Was Llewyn always this way, or is he trapped in a spiral of grief after Mike's loss? This, perhaps, would explain his dolour. Jean could never be this Ulysses's Penelope, and he will never have an Ithaca. His voyage takes place within a 

drably Hopper-esque American landscape that sees him boomerang between bad memories and botched opportunities; at the film's close, Llewyn is missing an early Dylan performance because his drunk mouth has earned him a beating. Yet there are glimmers of the hearth even here. On the road, Llewyn passes an Ohio city where there lives, he has recently learnt, a child he didn't know he had. He resists the siren-call of this glowing exit but, on his return to New York, he is heartily welcomed by friends he's wronged, and he feels their warmth. Tragedy, the Coens suggest, is not the failure to make money (or art, for that matter) but the failure to feel connected to others. They give us reasons to wonder if their protagonist might not be beyond hope. After seeing his record, also titled *Inside Llewyn Davis*, Grossman jokes about hearing what's 'inside' him. In response, Llewyn sings a song about a queen who dies in childbirth. But the baby lives. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Scott Rudin
Ethan Coen
Joel Coen
Written by
Joel Coen
Ethan Coen
Director of Photography
Bruno Delbonnel
Edited by
Roderick Jaynes
[i.e. Joel Coen
Ethan Coen]
Production Designer
Jess Gonchor
Executive Music Producer
T Bone Burnett
Supervising Sound Editor
Skip Lievsay
Costumes Designed by
Mary Zophres

@Long Strange Trip LLC
Production Companies
A StudioCanal presentation
In association with Anton Capital Entertainment
Executive Producers
Robert Graf
Olivier Courson
Ron Halpern

Cast
Oscar Isaac
Llewyn Davis
Carey Mulligan
Jean Berkey
John Goodman
Roland Turner
Garrett Hedlund
Johnny Five
F. Murray Abraham
Bud Grossman

Justin Timberlake
Jim Berkey
Stark Sands
Troy Nelson
Adam Driver
Al Cody
Jeanine Serralles
Joy
Max Casella
Pappi Corsicato
Ethan Phillips
Mitch Gorfein
Robin Bartlett
Lillian Gorfein

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited
9,411 ft +0 frames

New York City, 1961. Following the suicide of his musical partner Mike, Llewyn Davis is couch-surfing and struggling as a folk musician. Leaving the home of Mitch and Lillian Gorfein, he accidentally locks out their cat, Ulysses; he takes the cat with him to his agent's office (where he finds no work) and then to see his musician friends Jim and Jean. Jean tells Llewyn that she is pregnant with his child. Ulysses escapes. Llewyn visits his sister and gets work as a session musician on a novelty song written by Jim. Llewyn grabs a cat he thinks is Ulysses. While arranging an abortion for Jean, Llewyn learns that a former girlfriend did not, as he had believed, abort their child. He returns to the Gorfeins but the cat isn't theirs and they fall out.

Llewyn hitches a ride to Chicago with ailing jazzman Roland Turner and his 'valet' Johnny Five. At a service station, Roland overdoses but recovers. When Johnny is arrested, Llewyn continues on to Chicago alone. He auditions for producer Bud Grossman, who offers him a supporting role in a trio, which Llewyn declines.

Back in New York, Llewyn visits his sick father and botches an attempt to rejoin the Merchant Marine. Jean has secured him a gig at the Gaslight club. The Gorfeins welcome him back and report the return of Ulysses. At the Gaslight, Llewyn plays well. Bob Dylan plays after him, but Llewyn is beaten up by the husband of a performer he heckled the night before and misses the show.

Journal de France

France 2012

Directors: Claudine Nougaret, Raymond Depardon



Shooting the past: Raymond Depardon

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

See feature on page 38

The title *Journal de France* is teasingly ambivalent, suggesting at once something like the urgency of a news report and at the same time an intimate diary. But any sense that this

documentary about documentary is strictly a portrait – whether public or intimate – of France is belied by a comment from Raymond Depardon: he says it took all his years of travelling abroad to make him want to come back to France and film it. The France seen through Depardon's eyes is in effect, despite the many documentaries he has made there over the years, something of a foreign country to him.

At once a fond tribute, a career 'best of' and a detached rather than intimate study of Depardon by Claudine Nougaret, his partner and sound recordist since the mid-80s, *Journal de France* nevertheless offers a portrait of France in two senses. First, in the glimpses it provides of certain national institutions, legal, political and otherwise: hence hitherto unseen material from *Reporters*, Depardon's 1981 film about the work of press photographers; from films on citizens' experiences of the French legal system; and from a 1966 documentary on the presidential campaign of then finance minister Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. It was on the latter film that Depardon says he found his own style of 'direct cinema', his 'looking and listening' style – but the resulting footage's revealing insights into the political backstage area resulted in Giscard banning the feature once he entered office. You can see why, given the footage of the future president cynically proposing that the best way to win his campaign might be to make fine speeches but otherwise do nothing.

The other sense in which this film is a portrait of France is that it offers a sense of the international issues and locations that have most preoccupied the nation since the 60s. Depardon's reportage takes him to Haiti, the West Bank and Prague in 1969, but understandably, given France's fraught colonial past, Africa is foremost among his destinations. His journeys range from a 1966 trip to the Central African Republic, where we meet Jean-Bédél Bokassa before he became a self-styled and much feared 'Emperor', to a visit to Johannesburg in 1993, where (in a

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Claudine Nougaret
Written by
Claudine Nougaret
Raymond Depardon
Cinematography
Raymond Depardon
Editor
Simon Jacquet
Sound Recordists
Claudine Nougaret
Guillaume Sciamma
Yolande Decarsin
Sophie Chiabaut

©Palmerie et désert, France

2 Cinéma Production Companies
Palmerie et désert presents a Palmerie et désert/ France 2 Cinéma co-production With the participation of France Télévisions, Canal+, CineCinéma, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée With the support of Région Ile-de-France

in partnership with CNC In association with Wild Bunch

In Colour and Black and White
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Sound recordist and filmmaker Claudine Nougaret comments on an anthology she has assembled of outtakes and unseen footage from the work of documentarist-photographer Raymond Depardon, with whom she has collaborated since the mid-80s. The footage spans a period from the early 60s to the present, and takes in Depardon's coverage of current affairs both around the world and in France. Today, Depardon is seen driving around France looking for sites to photograph.

Killing Oswald

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Shane O'Sullivan

Reviewed by Kim Newman

"This is Oswald's story," announces a caption at the outset of Shane O'Sullivan's documentary. "Why he died and why it still matters."

Fifty years on, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy remains the greatest mystery of the 20th century, just as the identity of Jack the Ripper is the greatest mystery of the 19th. Despite the proliferation of testimony, news footage (this features surprisingly extensive film material on Oswald, from months before the assassination and between his arrest and murder in 1963), official and unofficial enquiries and successive revelations from the archives, we seem no closer to an answer in either of these cases. O'Sullivan – following up his *RFK Must Die: The Assassination of Bobby Kennedy* (2007) – doesn't exactly present anything definitive or fresh in this trapeze through the files.

Killing Oswald consists of interviews with researchers, staged scenes in which actors representing Oswald and others enact extracts from contemporary documents (Oswald's letters to his brother from Russia, his interview with a Soviet official in Mexico City in which he sets forth a case for the USSR accepting him as a defector), familiar documentary scenes of Kennedy at home or on the podium, the much pored-over footage of the assassinations themselves, archive interview material with characters from the margins of the extraordinarily peculiar life of Lee Harvey Oswald, and sparing snippets from fiction films and TV shows, ranging from *Seven Days in May* (1964) to *Annie Hall* (1977), which illuminate aspects of the cultural and political fallout of the two killings under the microscope here.

Researcher/author Dick Russell, whose take gets most time, announces that there are broadly two churches of believers about JFK and Lee Harvey Oswald: those who think that both men were murdered by 'lone nuts' with no agendas beyond their own whims, and those (of whom Oliver Stone is listed as the great prophet) who see a vast conspiracy involving any or all of a checklist of factions (the Mafia, the CIA, the FBI, Cuban exiles, the military-industrial complex, the Soviet Union) to kill the president and pin the crime on 'patsy' Oswald. Russell, as it happens, holds a belief almost halfway between the points



Conspiracy weary: Lee Harvey Oswald

– that Oswald was the lone gunman, taking his killing shots from the Book Depository, but was acting on behalf of forces hoping to provoke a US invasion of Cuba. In this take, Jack Ruby was another agent of this shadowy (ie theoretical) alliance between anti-communism, organised crime and the US intelligence services, called in to kill Oswald when the original plan didn't quite work out. It is mooted that after the killing, Oswald was supposed to be 'disappeared', with evidence left suggesting he had fled to Cuba. His chequered past – a marine involved in the U-2 spy flights over Russia, a defector to the Soviet Union who changed his mind and returned to America with a Russian wife, a leafleteer on behalf of an imaginary pro-Castro Fair Play for Cuba Committee – would then serve to depict him as a Manchurian Candidate-like instrument of Communist Evil. But Lyndon Johnson, who knew all too well how inheriting a plan to invade Cuba from a previous administration had worked out for Kennedy, didn't bite.

The most impressive element of *Killing Oswald* is the footage of Oswald, in high-contrast, noirish black-and-white – articulate and precise when interviewed about his Marxist leanings and calmly asking for "legal representation" when hustled past reporters while in custody. He is certainly more persuasive (which is not to say innocent) in the circumstances than Ruby, whose declaration that only he knows the full story of why he shot Oswald comes across as shiftily and self-dramatising. O'Sullivan tries to push a reason for the assassination in terms of political objectives and the manipulation of the fates of nations, but Oswald isn't really understandable on those terms. Even with assassins whose identity is not disputed, the real puzzle is that the stated aims don't quite jibe with the actions, and the contradictions in Oswald's politics and the possibility that he was impersonated by someone else in a way that might suggest a frame being created are dwarfed by the old question – which Dorothy L. Sayers, devoting herself to a series of plays drawn from the Gospels, asked of Judas Iscariot – "What on earth was he thinking?"

This lets us hear more from Oswald than most Kennedy associational texts, from Stone's *JFK* (1991) to *Parkland* (2013), but still doesn't dare even to speculate about what was going on inside his skull. ☹

sequence that has become all the more moving since his death) a relaxed Nelson Mandela gives the camera one minute of silence – which he himself is able to gauge to the very second, a skill acquired in his years of imprisonment.

Africa is also where Depardon finds a particular sense of purpose: he spent two years in Chad documenting the ordeal of archaeologist Françoise Claustre, held hostage by rebels. One of the film's most remarkable sequences is a poignant, even harrowing interview with the still-captive Claustre, who talks about the monotony of her days ("I try to think about nothing... I'm suffocating") before letting her desperation and rage emerge nakedly on camera. Ironically, Depardon's success in getting footage of Claustre shown on French TV, thereby winning support for her plight, resulted in his own imprisonment for failing to help her – an episode worth a documentary in its own right, although only briefly noted here.

Now 71, Depardon has continued to travel widely – an assembly of his recent work includes footage of the US, Russia, China and an unidentified rainforest. But interspersed throughout *Journal de France* are sequences of Depardon's recent explorations of his native country and its less spectacular corners. The filmmaker recorded French rural life in his documentary series *Profil paysans* (2001-08), but the still photography project we see him undertaking here, deliberately using a large unwieldy box camera and plates, seems very much a personal quest, whether for a France he once knew or for an alternative image of the 'state of the nation'. The affable, unassuming Depardon is seen driving around looking for mundane locales that spark his interest – village cafés, shops, drab stretches of seaside promenades – which he attempts to photograph without people or cars in sight. He appears to be searching for a disappearing France – he gets a haircut from a barber who is about to lose his shop after 50 years – although there's no reason to imagine that these nondescript, barely populated corners won't continue as they are for many years to come, possibly as durable as the pictures Depardon takes of them.

Despite the intimacy with which Nougaret talks about his career (she is herself filmed by Depardon in the mid-80s), the man behind the camera remains an elusive presence. And it's no doubt his self-effacing qualities that have enabled him to shoot such revealing footage as the long take of Paris policemen chatting about recent cases, having apparently forgotten Depardon's presence in their van with them.

A number of famous names are glimpsed or pictured at length: apart from Giscard and Mandela, we see Jacques Chirac, Jean-Luc Godard, Alain Delon and, in a wonderfully jubilant moment, Eric Rohmer letting his hair down with cast and crew on location for *The Green Ray*, on which Nougaret worked. But this fascinating film really belongs to those people whose names never made the history books, barely even their local newspaper headlines – like the Parisian psychiatric patient making a lengthy and intimate *cri de coeur*, or an argumentative defendant on a driving violation charge, in every sense making the most of his day in court. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Director of Photography
Dramatic
Reconstruction:
Bahareh Hosseini
Re-recording Mixer
Mauricio D'Orey

©E2 Films
Production Company
A film by Shane O'Sullivan
Film Extracts
Annie Hall (1977)
Seven Days in May (1963)

With
John Newman
Dick Russell
David Kaiser
Joan Mellen
Antonio Veciana
Eugenio Martinez

Cast
Raymond Burns
Lee Harvey Oswald
Nigel Barber
David Atlee Phillips
Luke Hope
Richard Snyder

Vitaly Yerenkov
Valery Kostikov
Livia Sardao
Silvia Duran

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
E2 Films

A documentary assessment of theories surrounding the killings of President John F. Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas in 1963, using contemporary footage, interviews with experts and staged scenes from Oswald's life.

Kiss the Water

USA/United Kingdom 2013
Director: Eric Steel
Certificate PG 79m 2s

Reviewed by Sukhdev Sandhu

See interview
on page 10

In 2009 Barack Obama was being interviewed at the White House by a CNBC political journalist, when a fly landed on his arm. For a second he ignored his questioner to focus on his sleeve, whose temporary squatter he swatted. "That was pretty impressive, wasn't it?" he asked. "I got the sucker." Though the charity PETA labelled Obama's action "an execution", most viewers cheered on the president for his pre-emptive strike against a creature that, throughout history, has been seen as a metaphor for contagion, insignificance, death itself. Filmic depictions, most notably in Yoko Ono's *Fly* (1970) and David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986), portray it as a creeping predator or sign of ghastly mutation.

It may come as a surprise then to learn that Eric Steel's *Kiss the Water*, a work of mystery and magic, of privacy and poetry, is a documentary about artificial flies. More precisely: the art of artificial flies. The creations fashioned in the north of Scotland by Megan Boyd – all delicacy and filigree, retina-confounding bursts of colour, almost inconceivable conjunctions of feather and fur – were described by an American journal as the "Tiffanys of the 20th century". Perhaps Monet and Cézanne are better comparisons: Boyd, who died in 2001 at the age of 86, excelled not so much at realist flies that conformed to anglers' desire for verisimilitude, but at impressionist flies that literally allured salmon.

In recent years, micro-histories of subjects such as salt, toothpicks and the pencil have become publishing staples. Filmmakers, including Gary Hustwit (*Helvetica*) and Hartmut Bitomsky (*Dust*) have followed suit. But *Kiss the Water* makes no supersized claims for fly-fishing as a way to understand history. It does not position Boyd as a cutesy eccentric to be cherished by the same people (myself included) who cooed over the 1980s Yellow Pages ad for 'Fly Fishing by J.R. Hartley', nor as an outsider artist ripe for inclusion in what, in a show by Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane, might be called the expanded 'folk archive' of post-war Britain.

At the outset, Steel, in the only piece of voiceover he contributes, distinguishes between two modes of fishing: one exults in mastery and thinks of catching the fish as a resolution; the other cherishes the brief, almost philosophical moment in which a kind of third space emerges – between capturing a fish and



Come fly with me: *Kiss the Water*

letting it go, between having it in one's hands and liberating it back into the water. It is this moment – of scrutiny and wonderment – that the film beautifully expands on and illuminates. No images of Boyd are shown (except for one brief shot where she resembles an elderly Wes Anderson): Steel, unlike most biopic directors, allows his subject to remain elusive and free.

Boyd brought extraordinary imagination and manual dexterity to the assemblage of her flies; some of them include strands of hair from people she met, others incorporate feathers of birds who have since become extinct. Close-up shots of flies being crafted recall not so much the BBC potter's wheel interlude films of the 1950s and 1960s as the almost ghostly motion-dance of a theremin-player's hands.

Steel, whose equally singular hydro-poetic documentary *The Bridge* (2006) focused on people who jump off San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, emerges as a virtuoso interview-angler, who spends a lot of time in the company of apparently reserved country people and knows exactly when to reel them in. "Time flies for fishermen, not for fish," one of Boyd's acquaintances declares. Another, at pains to debunk any notion that she was hermit-like, claims: "She was never alone; she had her seasons." So many documentaries function as epitaphs or obituaries, but *Kiss the Water*, delightfully scored by Paul Cantelon and featuring animated sequences that exude the vivid colours and energy of a Howard Hodgkin painting, ripples with such joy that it fully lives up to its subtitle: 'A Love Story'. **S**

Labor Day

USA 2013
Director: Jason Reitman
Certificate 12A 111m 5s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Jason Reitman's fifth feature comes as something of a shock. His previous films – *Thank You for Smoking*, *Junö*, *Up in the Air* and *Young Adult* – all shared a hip, cynical edge; not devoid of sentiment, but keeping it on an ironic leash. But *Labor Day* (adapted from the novel by Joyce Maynard) unashamedly stakes its claim as an old-style women's weepie that wouldn't have disgraced Douglas Sirk. And, like Sirk at his best, Reitman plays on the emotion while guarding it from brimming over into excess – at least until an ill-judged last few minutes.

Kate Winslet, always good at frazzled and distracted, is Adele, whose desertion by her husband has left her – as her concerned 13-year-old son Henry notes – feeling that she's lost not just a husband but love itself. All the more so since her ex's new, younger wife is pregnant. Into her bleak life comes the dream figure of Frank, the perfect lover and ideal nurturing father-figure for Henry, skilled and confident, endlessly adept around the house, a great cook, with just one small flaw: he's a convicted murderer on the run after a jailbreak.

The high point of Frank's benedictory stay isn't any of the sex scenes between him and Adele – which are treated discreetly – but his making and baking of a peach pie, a process to which Reitman devotes so much enthralled attention as to raise *Labor Day* into the pantheon of Great Foodie Movies alongside *Babette's Feast* (1987) and *Big Night* (1996). The unabashed eroticism lavished by Eric Steelberg's camera on the preparation of this dish is underlined by Frank's comment to Adele, as she prepares the piecrust mix under his instructions: "You're right on the verge of crumbling any moment." As indeed she visibly is.

This is of course a fairytale, several degrees removed from reality, and Josh Brolin registers as much in his performance as Frank, manfully suppressing any temptation to wink at the audience. So the odd lacuna in narrative logic can be forgiven – for example, Frank's ploy of tying up Adele and Henry just before the cops come for



Man about the house: Kate Winslet, Josh Brolin

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Eric Steel
Kate Swan
Director of Photography
Ole Bratt Birkeland
Editor
Sabine Krayenbühl
Music
Paul Cantelon
Sound Design
Margaret Grimmins
Greg Smith
Animation Directed/

Designed by
Em Cooper
@Easy Three Tiger, Inc.
Production Companies
An Easy Three Tiger and Slate North production
In association with BBC Scotland and Creative Scotland
An Eric Steel film
Supported by the

National Lottery through Creative Scotland
Executive Producer
Andrea Calderwood

In Colour
[178:1]

Distributor
Independent Cinema Office

7113 ft +0 frames

A documentary portrait of Megan Boyd, a famed maker of fishing flies, who died in 2001 at the age of 86. For most of her life Boyd lived alone in a small, barely accessible cottage without electricity on the north coast of Scotland. A creature of habit who left school at 14 and learnt her art from a manual, she liked to wear a man's shirt and tie, and latterly rode a motorbike very fast. Over time her creations attracted the notice of Prince Charles, and she was awarded the British Empire Medal. In old age her eyesight began to fail and she moved into a nursing home. In the film, local residents recall her with fondness.

Lone Survivor

Director: Peter Berg

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The centrepiece of *Lone Survivor* is an immersive, harrowing simulation of a firefight between four Navy SEALs and a much greater force of Afghan militia, which ends with three of the Americans, and all the 16 men sent to rescue them, dead. Dominating the film, it is a triumph of advanced makeup and Foley artistry: the SEALs are very graphically and audibly wounded before they are put out of their considerable misery. Torn to pieces by bullets and shrapnel, they survive for as long as they do only by throwing themselves down a steep rock face – twice. Rather more than the treatment of the engagement itself, which probably overstates the number of Afghan militiamen and the SEALs' success in shooting them, the sound of bones breaking and skulls cracking is sickeningly convincing, so much so that it breaks up the propagandist surface of the rest of the film.

Peter Berg's last foray into contemporary politics, *The Kingdom* (2007), in which an FBI team investigated the bombing of a US-owned oil facility in Saudi Arabia, began with a lightning sketch of US-Saudi relations between 1932 and 2001. *Lone Survivor*, by contrast, begins with footage of SEALs in training, followed by a voiceover from the titular survivor, Marcus Luttrell (Mark Wahlberg), which makes war sound like a particularly extreme sport, all about pushing limits and his hunger for a fight "at the highest volume". The doomed men are introduced as doting fathers and husbands, physically impressive but otherwise regular guys, apparently able to keep their work and home lives safely distinct. What Luttrell calls the "storm inside of us" is calmed at the front door. They jog to uplifting guitar music and go to Coldplay concerts together.

Returning to this mode after the battle scenes, *Lone Survivor* ends with a series of photographs of the Americans who died in the real-life Operation Red Wings, each captioned and illustrated with unit insignia, accompanied by a bad cover version



Trigger happy: *Lone Survivor*

of David Bowie's 'Heroes'. Luttrell's closing voiceover, meanwhile, echoes a speech of Sergeant Hartman's in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) – "the Marine Corps lives forever, and that means *you* live forever" – without its satirical intent. By removing the reference to the institution, Luttrell's words are even more mystifying: "There is a part of me that lived. Because of my brothers, because of them, I am still alive." Who needs reasons when you have brotherhood? The events depicted in the film took place in 2005. We are shown Luttrell alive and well, and one of the Afghans who helped him, but what of the villages where the operation was conducted?

The battle is won when the air cavalry rides to the rescue, shooting all the bad Afghans and not one of the good ones. But it is impossible to believe that anything was settled, if only because of what we have already seen of the American operation. By showing, even without commenting on it, the tactical absurdity of Red Wings, which goes wrong simply but predictably because Luttrell's team are spotted by unsympathetic Afghan civilians, *Lone Survivor* is, once again, poor propaganda for the campaign of a decade ago. But it is, perhaps, quite effective propaganda for what is not shown: the regime of drone strikes. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lianne Halfon
Russell Smith
Jason Reitman
Helen Estabrook

Written for the screen by
Jason Reitman
Based on the novel by Joyce Maynard

Director of Photography
Eric Steelberg
Film Editor
Jeffrey Clifford

Production Designer
Steve Saklad

Music

Rolfe Kent

Sound Mixer

Steven A. Morrow

Costume Designer
Danny Glicker

©Paramount Pictures Corporation and Frank's Pie Company, LLC
Production

Companies
Paramount Pictures and Indian Paintbrush present a Right of Way/Mr. Mudd production
A film by Jason Reitman

Executive Producers

Steven Rales

Mark Roybal

Michael Beugg

Jeffrey Clifford

Film Extracts

Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977)

Cast

Kate Winslet

Adele

Josh Brolin

Frank Chambers

Gatlin Griffith

Henry Wheeler

Clark Gregg

Gerald

J.K. Simmons

Mr Jervis

Brooke Smith
Evelyn
James Van Der Beek
Officer Treadwell
Tom Lipinski
young Frank
Maika Monroe
Mandy

Brigid Fleming

Eleanor

Alexie Gilmore

Marjorie

Tobey Maguire

adult Henry

Dolby Digital/

Datasat

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Paramount Pictures UK

9,997 ft +8 frames

Labor Day weekend in a small town in Massachusetts, 1987. Adele, a divorced woman in her late thirties, lives with her 13-year-old son Henry. He's been worried about her depression ever since his father left her for another woman. In a store in town they're approached by a bearded man, bleeding at the waist, who demands they give him a lift. Scared, Adele obeys and takes the man to their house. He is Frank Chambers, an escaped convict who's serving 18 years for murder. He ties Adele up so that she can say he kidnapped her, then expertly makes dinner for her and Henry. On TV there's news of the manhunt. He releases Adele, and sleeps on the couch overnight.

Over the next few days Frank fixes things around the house, coaches Henry at baseball and prepares meals – including a masterly peach pie. He and Adele are increasingly attracted, and by the second night they're sleeping together. Flashbacks reveal Frank's crime: he accidentally killed his wife when he suspected her of having a baby by another man. It's decided that he, Adele and Henry will flee to Canada; they pack up the house and Adele withdraws her savings from the bank. Henry leaves a farewell note for his father, but it's read too soon. Frank ties up Adele again, and Henry as well, just before police surround the house and arrest him.

The adult Henry recalls how he gained confidence at school, took up bakery and founded his own pie-making company. Frank was eventually released and he and Adele were reunited.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Peter Berg

Sarah Aubrey

Randall Emmett

Norton Herrick

Barry Spikings

Akiva Goldsman

Mark Wahlberg

Stephen Levinson

Vitaly Grigoriants

Screenplay

Peter Berg

based on the book by

Marcus Luttrell with

Patrick Robinson

Director of Photography

Eric Steelberg

Tobias Schliessler

Editor

Colby Parker Jr

Production Designer

Tom Duffield

Music

Explosions in the Sky

Steve Jablonsky

Sound Mixer

David Brownlow

Costume Designer

Amy Stofsky

Stunt Co-ordinator

Kevin Scott

©[TBC]

Production

Companies

Universal Pictures

and Emmett/Furla

Films present a

Film 44, Emmett/

Furla Films, Herrick

Entertainment,

Envision

Entertainment,

Spikings

Entertainment, Single

Berry, Closest to

the Hole, Leverage

production

A Peter Berg film

Executive Producers

George Furla

Simon Fawcett

Braden Aftergood

Louis G. Friedman

Remington Chase

Stepan Martirosyan

Adi Shankar

Spencer Silna

Mark Damon

Brandt Andersen

Jeff Rice

Lauren Selig

Jason Shuman

Cast

Mark Wahlberg

Marcus Luttrell

Taylor Kitsch

Michael Murphy

Emile Hirsch

Danny Dietz

Ben Foster

Matthew Axelson, 'Axe'

Eric Bana

Erik S. Kristensen

Ali Suliman

Gulab

Alexander Ludwig

Shane Patton

Yousuf Azami

Ahmad Shah

Sammy Sheik

Taraq

Scott Elrod

Peter Musselman

Dolby Digital/

Datasat/SDDS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Part-subtitled

Distributor

Universal Pictures

International

UK & Eire

Afghanistan, 2005. Four Navy SEALs are sent to reconnoitre a village near the Pakistan border in advance of an operation to kill or capture militia commander Ahmad Shah. The SEALs have difficulty communicating with base, and almost immediately encounter three goatherds. After debating whether to kill the goatherds, tie them up or let them go, team leader Michael Murphy decides to abandon the mission and head for higher ground, where there will be better radio coverage to call for a helicopter to retrieve them. The SEALs' communications do not improve, however, and the goatherds, once

released, inform the militia in the village of the SEALs' presence. Soon the SEALs are surrounded. In the ensuing skirmish only one of them, Marcus Luttrell, survives. Murphy dies making a successful radio transmission to base, but the rescue helicopter is blown out of the sky by an enemy rocket-propelled grenade, killing all on board. Luttrell, badly wounded, is taken to safety by Afghan civilians, one of whom is sent to seek help from a nearby US base. Luttrell's rescuers defy Ahmad Shah and his men when they come to search the village. US forces arrive just in time to fight off Shah's men. Luttrell is evacuated.

Moon Man

Germany/France/Ireland 2012
Director: Stephan Schesch
Certificate U 95m 24s

Reviewed by Derek O'Connor

Renowned as a political commentator, satirical cartoonist, novelist, award-winning children's author and self-proclaimed "archivist of human absurdity", French polymath Tomi Ungerer has enjoyed a rather extraordinary – and profoundly unclassifiable – career. He is now in his eighties and resident in Ireland, and his singular oeuvre takes in everything from the iconic poster for Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove* to an extended detour into out-there erotica that saw his works removed from libraries. (A documentary portrait, *Far Out Isn't Far Enough*, being released at the same time as this film, paints a vivid portrait of a fearless talent, profoundly informed by life as a child under Nazi occupation.)

It's only fitting, then, that this feature-length version of his most beloved children's title should be as beguilingly eclectic (nay positively eccentric) as Ungerer himself, who consulted on the project and sombrely narrates the onscreen action. A German-Irish-French co-production from Cartoon Saloon, who won a deserved Oscar nomination for the exceptional *The Secret of Kells* (2009), *Moon Man* is tangibly infused with affection for its source material, originally published in 1966, and the irreverent worldview of its creator and his extraterrestrial alter ego.

Here, as on the page, the eponymous Man in the Moon remains a soulful naïf, seeking connection with the world below until his absence, deeply felt by Earth's children, guides his choice to return to the stars. Ungerer's pro-humanist, anti-establishment ethos remains not only intact but enhanced, as despotic baddie the President of the Earth gets his comeuppance in a decisive and amusing fashion, while the spirit of creativity, as defined by the eccentric Inventor of Everything, ensures that our moon-faced (and moon-bodied) hero finds his way home.

The story has been adapted as an animated

short before (in 1981), and Stephan Schesch's new adaptation inevitably suffers from the usual predicaments facing picture books turned into feature-length entertainments: the necessity to expand a slim, elliptical narrative into something – allegedly – more substantive. It's always a gamble: works such as *Shrek* and *Where the Wild Things Are* (whose author Maurice Sendak cited Ungerer as a key influence) took bold creative leaps en route, while Chris Van Allsburg's *The Polar Express* transmogrified into a bewildering mopey monstrosity that almost – almost – destroyed the magic of the original book. *Moon Man* still retains the power of the delightful parable that inspired it, and certainly isn't afraid to let its gentle, surrealistic longueurs play out, with winning results.

Writer-director Schesch previously adapted Ungerer's book *Three Robbers* for the screen. There's a heartfelt sincerity to his approach, which combines with a handmade, untidy feel to create a vital antidote to the relentless onslaught of the computer-generated behemoths dominating today's global animation industry. Bonus points as well for the daffy, unobtrusive score, which incorporates everything from Louis Armstrong's 'Moon River' to Iron Butterfly's prog-rock monster 'In-a-Gadda-Da-Vida', previously heard bringing home the shattering climax to Michael Mann's *Manhunter*. 



Field of beams: *Moon Man*

Credits and Synopsis

Co-director Sarah Clara Weber	Volker Krafzel Gyula Szabo	Development supported by Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film, FFA	Deutscher Film, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg GmbH, Irish Film Board, MEDIA	Voice Cast English language version Katharina Thalbach Moon Man Pat Laffan Professor Bunsen van der Dunkel, 'Inventor of Everything' Michael McElhatton President of the Earth Paul McLoone father Taylor Mooney daughter Helen Mooney Conquista Tomi Ungerer	narrator
Producer Stephan Schesch	Animation Supervisor Heidi Yilun	Filmförderungsanstalt, MEDIA, Der Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien, FFF Bayern	In association with La Banque Postale Image 6, Cinemage 6, Cofinova 8, La Sofica Manon 2		Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]
Writer Stephan Schesch	Chen-Ceslik Gyula Szabo	Production supported by Eurimages, FFA	With participation of Orange Cinema Series		Distributor Wildcard Distribution
Editor Sarah Clara Weber	Sound Design David Ziegler	Filmförderungsanstalt, CNC, Der Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien, Deutscher Filmförderfonds, Kuratorium Junger	With section 481 financing Horwath Bastow Charleton, John Gleeson, Roisin Henahan		8,586 ft +0 frames
Character Design Michela Wagner Rasha El Sawy Gyula Szabo Heidi Yilun Chen-Ceslik Andrea Huyoff					German theatrical title Der Mondmann
Background & Location Design Robert Brandt					

The Man in the Moon spends his days watching over Earth, but he is lonely and yearns for the company of others. Grabbing on to the tail of a shooting star, he heads for Earth. Below, a young girl and her father return from a drive-in movie, pondering the moon above. In his office, the President of the Earth seeks new opportunities to expand his empire. Examining the crash site of the shooting star, he announces that Earth is under attack from extraterrestrials, and instructs the military to search for the alleged invaders. The President asks the Earth's foremost genius, the Inventor of Everything, to build him a vehicle for space travel, with

a view to laying claim to the moon. Moon Man, in the meantime, evades the military and revels in his travels, enjoying encounters with the planet's wildlife and fauna and finding a warm welcome at a children's costume party. He seeks refuge at the home of the Inventor, but is subsequently captured by the President. When the children of Earth find themselves unable to sleep without his presence above, Moon Man finally accepts that he must return. With the help of the young girl and her father, he escapes the President's clutches. He happily returns to the moon, on the Inventor's ship, originally intended for the President, who is left adrift in space.

Moshi Monsters The Movie

United Kingdom/USA 2013
Director: Wip Vernooij
Certificate m s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

The British cartoon film *Moshi Monsters: The Movie* is based on a children's online game in which players control a range of cute monsters in their fantasy world. For non-converts, *Moshi Monsters* looks like Japanese franchises such as *Pokémon* and *Digimon* – one of the main monsters, called Katsuma, bears an obvious resemblance to Pokémon's mascot Pikachu. However, the film feels closer to America's *SpongeBob SquarePants* in its cute-grotesque designs – monsters with rubbery lips, swivelling eyes and funny walks – and its humour.

The comedy isn't as sharp as in *SpongeBob*, and the action relies heavily on copying bits of *Indiana Jones* movies in cartoon form. Nonetheless, the film is surprisingly watchable for parents dragged to see it. The main characters are deftly introduced, there's much background business for home replays, and even a healthy moral. The protagonist Katsuma has the personality of a boastful boy and is determined to be the star of the adventure. Consequently, he comes a cropper but is redeemed by working together with his friends.

Animated by Spider Eye Studios in Cornwall, *Moshi Monsters* doesn't feel exactly handmade (it uses an animation software called CelAction 2D). However, the cheerfully colourful 2D designs make a pleasant break from Pixar-style CGI (though they'd blend right in with many American TV cartoons). Unfortunately, the charmless voices of Katsuma and some of the other characters grate almost instantly. Like many cartoons, *Moshi Monsters* is stolen by its baddie, Dr Strangelove (sic), who wastes no time hiding his villainy and gets straight down to the business of flowery insults and silly schemes. 



Moshi Monsters

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jocelyn Stevenson Giles Healy Written by Stephen Cleverley Jocelyn Stevenson Music Sanj Sen Animation Spider Eye Studios	Voice Cast Tom Clarke-Hill Furl/Roary Scrawl Phillipa Alexander Poppet Ashley Slater Dr Strangelove/ Zommer Emma Tate Katsuma/Luvli Rajesh David Bobbi SingSong Steve Cleverley Sweet Tooth Keith Wickham Buster Bumblechops/	Diavlo Boris Hiestand Fishlips In Colour [1.85:1] Distributor Universal Pictures International UK & Eire 7,290 ft +0 frames
---	--	--

In the world of Moshi Monsters, the malign Dr Strangelove steals an ancient egg, then forces a group of monsters to find the ingredients that will make it hatch an abomination. However, the monsters learn to work together, defeat Strangelove and save the egg.



Quote: **NEWYEAR** for 15% off all Last Exit to Nowhere items

OFFER EXPIRES 31.01.14

LastExitToNowhere.com

info@lastexittonowhere.com | @LastEXITshirts | facebook.com/LastExitToNowhere

Oldboy

Director: Spike Lee
Certificate 18 104m 17s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

See Spike Lee
feature online

Choosing exactly who to pick on in the remake of *Oldboy* is a difficult task, because there's plenty of competition. It's tempting to tee off on Spike Lee for pouncing on such a transparently commercial project after his old rival Steven Spielberg failed to secure the rights back in 2008. One could also cite the failures of the actors: minor in the case of Josh Brolin and Elizabeth Olsen, egregious when talking about Samuel L. Jackson and Sharlto Copley (who is now zero-for-two in dastardly villain roles this year after this and *Elysium*). The only truly blameless major collaborator is DP Sean Bobbitt, whose dynamic widescreen compositions (including some passages in 16mm) provide the finishing touches on his personal banner year of nicely burnished turkeys (*The Place Beyond the Pines*, *Byzantium*). But the main culprit in *Oldboy*'s abject badness would seem to be scriptwriter Mark Protosevich. His adaptation of Park Chanwook's 2003 hit unfortunately lives down to his previous Hollywood track record (*The Cell*, *Poseidon*).

Ten years after it copped a prize at Cannes and ushered in the South Korean new wave, *Oldboy* is remembered for its money shots (the octopus, the severed tongue) more than its storytelling. Yet those stylishly grimy surface textures were laid over themes as solid and heavy as reinforced steel – rage, revenge and repentance. Protosevich follows the blueprint dutifully at first. Everything in *Oldboy* 2.0's first half – the introduction of Brolin's feckless, alcoholic NYC adman Joe Doucett; his subsequent, surreally rendered abduction and long-term incarceration by parties unknown for reasons unstated; and his equally unfathomable release back into the world 20 years and several thousand six-pack-forming sit-ups later – scans as a faded photocopy of the source material.

The second half at least has some of its own flavour but unfortunately it's as rancid as week-old take-out dumplings. Whereas Park was smart enough to pay bloodied lip service to the moral cost of his protagonist's vigilante rampage against his captors – recall that *Oldboy* was the middle instalment of a so-called vengeance trilogy – Protosevich frames his quest more or less heroically. He also excises any elements that might truly complicate the audience's relationship to Joe. Recall that in Park's film, the protagonist clumsily attempts to rape a young woman who takes pity on him. Here, comely aid worker Marie (Olsen) is hot to trot for Joe from the moment she first lays eyes on him, and it's he who initially rejects her advances.

Brolin is a fine actor who always finds the right body language for his characters (his watchful comportment in *No Country for Old Men* was terrifically vivid) and he cuts a streamlined figure here – quite the opposite of Choi Minsik's addled, desperate persona in the original. Lee doesn't do nearly enough to undermine his star's superhero appeal; rather, he just keeps finding ways to consolidate it. Compare the original's centrepiece – the justly lauded single-take sequence in which the main character takes out a dozen thugs with a single claw hammer – with its trans-Pacific doppelganger. Where Park smartly downplayed



Sucker punch: Josh Brolin

his *coup de cinéma* via an almost desultory sense of camera placement and movement, Lee stages the proceedings with a sense of videogame flourish. Instead of simply moving slowly down a crowded corridor, Joe literally descends from platform to platform like an 8-bit avatar.

Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor exploited the comedic potential in this sort of side-scrolling amorality in the *Crank* films, which slyly

hyperbolised genre-movie tropes. If Lee is similarly trying to flex his satirical muscles, however, they're atrophied from disuse since *Bamboozled* (2000). Any heavy lifting will have to be done by critics trying to elevate this piece of obvious hackwork to the level of auteurist contemplation. Somebody else should give it a try, provided they're willing to really put their back into it.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Roy Lee
Doug Davison
Nathan Kahane
Screenplay
Mark Protosevich
Based upon the
Korean motion
picture *Oldboy*
**Director of
Photography**
Sean Bobbitt
Editor

Barry Alexander
Brown
Production Designer
Sharon Seymour
Music
Roque Baños
Production Mixer
Steve C. Aaron
Costume Designer
Ruth E. Carter
Stunt Co-ordinator
Mark Norby

©OB Productions, Inc.
**Production
Companies**
FilmDistrict presents
in association with
Good Universe
a Vertigo
Entertainment/40
Acres and a Mule
production
A Spike Lee film
Executive Producers
Joe Drake

John Powers
Middleton
Peter Schlessel

Cast

Josh Brolin
Joe Doucett
Elizabeth Olsen
Marie Sebastian
Sharlto Copley
Adrian Pryce,
'the stranger'

Michael Imperioli

Chuck
Linda Emond
Edwina Burke
James Ranson
Dr Tom Melby
Max Casella
James Prestley
Samuel L. Jackson
Chaney

**Dolby Digital/
Datasat**

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Ire

9,385 ft +8 frames

New York, 1993. Alcoholic advertising executive Joe Doucett skips his daughter's third birthday party to close a deal, which he botches. After going on a self-destructive bender, he awakens in a hotel room with no doors or windows. Gradually he realises that he has been taken prisoner by an unknown party. Joe's captivity continues for years, during which time he learns (via TV broadcasts) that he's been accused of murdering his ex-wife. After attempting suicide (which is prevented by his captors), Joe dedicates himself to escaping in order to clear his name and get revenge on whoever has imprisoned him.

In 2013, Joe is finally released. He stumbles into the care of young doctor Marie, who reads the letters he wrote to his daughter while incarcerated and decides to help him. He gains access to the facility where he was held and barely escapes with his life after wiping out dozens of armed thugs; while Marie tends to his

wounds, she tries to kiss him but he sends her away.

Joe is approached at a bar by a stranger who reveals himself to be the man he's looking for; he tells Joe that he'll give him the means to clear his name, plus \$20 million in diamonds, if he can figure out the motivation for the crime. Joe and Marie grow closer, and while staying at a motel they make love. Joe realises that the man is Adrian Pryce, a former schoolmate whose sister was in an incestuous relationship with her father; Joe saw her having sex with him and spread the information to the other students. The shame caused Adrian's father to murder his wife and daughter. Since then Adrian has dedicated his life to making Joe pay. Adrian takes Joe to meet his daughter – but it is an actress posing as her; the TV broadcasts Joe watched in jail were fake. His daughter is actually Marie. After gloating, Adrian kills himself. Joe leaves Marie his new fortune and checks himself back into prison so that Marie will never learn his true identity.

Out of the Furnace

USA 2013

Director: Scott Cooper

Certificate 15 116m 37s

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

A negligible plot, limited budget and a pall of unremitting grimness – why is this film extraordinary? Well, start with the cast. You could argue that the quality speaks for itself, though the pre-release trailers have not left the point unsaid, underlining its stars' Oscar-magnet credentials in shouty captions just in case we didn't recognise their faces under the beards and grime. Indeed, it would be surprising if *Out of the Furnace* didn't rack up a few Academy nods next year, though it might be hard to share them out, because what's most impressive is that a single film could pull in such a battalion of talent, a royal flush of the finest grizzle-and-growl merchants in the business.

Christian Bale is riveting as the heartbreakingly upright Russell Baze, a good man in a bad place and no help coming. He sweats his days out at the one surviving steel mill in the rustbelt Pittsburgh suburb of Braddock, a life good enough for his father before him but nowhere near enough for his restless brother Rodney, played with a nicely calibrated mixture of charm and weakness by Casey Affleck. Rodney is a soldier, and four tours in Iraq have done nothing for his state of mind. Booze and gambling lead him into the bare-knuckle fight game, and that lands him in the clutches first of Braddock's resident crime boss Petty (Willem Dafoe) and finally of the psychopath DeGroat (Woody Harrelson), a hillbilly crackhead incontrovertibly established as the embodiment of pure evil right from the film's very first scene.

You can see where this is heading, and you're meant to. Harrelson plays DeGroat as a force of nature, seething with violence behind watery, vacant eyes, erupting without warning or motive, and almost without emotion. It's not personal for him. "Do you have a problem with me?" asks Russell in an early encounter. "I have a problem with everyone," DeGroat responds. Dafoe's Petty, in contrast, is a conflicted man; he needs to inspire a certain amount of fear to get the job done but he has an interest in maintaining the status quo. A lesser actor might have made Petty merely squalid or weaselly, Dafoe makes him almost sympathetic.



Burning man: Zoë Saldana, Christian Bale

It's astonishing that any film would throw away Forest Whitaker, but his role as police chief Wesley Barnes bears all the signs of having been severely cut at some point in the process, leaving him with only a couple of scenes in which to establish that the law rarely overlaps with justice in a town like Braddock. Sam Shepard, too, is underused as Russell's uncle Red, although like Whitaker he manages to make an impact in a leanly written part. Zoë Saldana, as a token female presence in a deliberately, almost parodically, all-male world, might also feel short-changed in a film that has been machine-tooled to offer actors respite from the churn of the Hollywood blockbuster cycle. But the restraint of actor-turned-writer-director Scott Cooper pays off: the film's pared-down quality makes it crackle and flare.

Cooper shot the film in a remarkable 33 days, and the adrenaline is palpable on screen. Tight, claustrophobic interiors combine with monumental but not overdetermined shots of rotting industrial architecture to create a frame for various failed paradigms of masculinity. Russell Baze's destiny unfolds with a chilling inevitability in a film that withholds any scrap of comfort from both him and the audience. Like Braddock itself, the film closes down options until only one path is visible. And then the trap closes over your head. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Jennifer Davisson
Killoran
Leonardo DiCaprio
Ryan Kavanaugh
Ridley Scott
Michael Costigan

Written by

Brad Ingelsby
Scott Cooper

Director of

Photography

Masanobu Takayanagi

Edited by

Production Designer

Thérèse DePrez

Music

Dickon Hinchliffe

Sound Mixer

James Emswiller

Costume Designers

Kurt & Bart

©Furnace Films, LLC

Production

Companies

Relativity Media

presents in

association with red
Granite Pictures a
Relativity Media,

Scott Free and Appian

Way production

A film by Scott Cooper

Executive Producers

Tucker Tooley

Ron Burkle

Jason Colbeck

Robbie Brenner

Brooklyn Weaver

Riza Aziz

Joey McFarland

Christian Mercuri

Joe Gatta

Jeff Waxman

Film Extracts

The Midnight Meat

Train (2008)

Cast

Christian Bale

Russell Baze

Woody Harrelson

Harlan DeGroat

Casey Affleck

Rodney Baze Jr

Forest Whitaker

Wesley Barnes

Willem Dafoe

John Petty

Zoë Saldana

Lena Taylor

Sam Shepard

Gerald 'Red' Baze

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Lionsgate UK

10,495 ft +8 frames

Pittsburgh, 2008. Russell Baze is a hardworking man who loves his girlfriend Lena and takes care of his terminally ill father and troubled brother Rodney. Coming to the end of a stint in the army, Rodney has gambling problems and owes money to local crime boss Petty, who is in turn heavily in debt to the violent Harlan DeGroat. Russell starts paying off what Rodney owes but a drink-driving accident lands him in jail. When he gets out, his girlfriend has left him, his father

is dead and Rodney is firmly embedded in Petty's world of bare-knuckle fights, losing bouts to order. Rodney persuades Petty to introduce him to DeGroat's big-money fights out in the Appalachian badlands, but their first encounter ends with DeGroat killing both Petty and Rodney. Local police refuse to investigate, so Russell and his uncle Red track down DeGroat themselves. Finally Russell must decide whether to kill DeGroat (and face death row) or let the police arrest him. He kills him.

The Patrol

United Kingdom 2012

Director: Tom Petch

Reviewed by Guy Westwell

The British war in Afghanistan is replete with a range of symbolically rich and politically controversial images: the ban on Islamic fundamentalists protesting at the parades for the returning dead at Wootton Bassett; the murder of Lee Rigby; the court martials of British soldiers for torture and murder; and the brute fact that in Helmand, after nearly ten years of war, there has been a significant increase in opium production and the Taliban remain powerful.

Rather than engage directly with any of this, *The Patrol* subjects the Afghan War to a high degree of abstraction. The reason may be related to the genre (the film's pared-down feel is familiar from any number of 'lost patrol' dramas), budget (which is used imaginatively but stretches only as far as seven actors and two Land Rovers) and a political pragmatism (after all, the issue of how the war has exacerbated contradictions at the heart of British multiculturalism is something very few filmmakers have attempted to address). Whatever the reason, writer-director and ex-Special Forces soldier Tom Petch makes a virtue out of necessity, using the abstract not to strip away politics and history, as with many such films, but to depict Afghanistan as a quasi-Beckettian universe in which the soldiers' actions, and the overall mission, quickly lose all meaning.

The soldiers drive and walk along tracks that loop aimlessly across the featureless landscape, their circular missions futile and repetitive, and the enemy – indeed the whole population – remains invisible. The spare use of CGI shows airstrikes and Special Forces raids taking place in the far distance, reducing the war to mere figures and faraway sounds. Under the harsh glare of the desert sun, the film shows the mission slowly dissipating into the dust. When the patrol's captain tries to maintain his



A handful of dust: *The Patrol*

authority over a disgruntled soldier with the line “We’re defending our country, you prick,” the reply – echoed by the whole patrol – is simply that this is not their war.

The film’s ending is downbeat and unexpected: a final image of the men leaving enemy territory counterpointed with P.J. Harvey’s ‘On Battleship Hill’. The singer’s plaintiff voice, and the line “Cruel nature, cruel, cruel nature”, speak to the way that the soldiers, the Afghans and even the landscape will long bear the marks of this pointless war.

A few elements irk. For example, the soldiers strike some self-consciously elegiac poses, which would be foolhardy given the threat they’d be under from sniper fire. The script, meanwhile, seeks to mix the sacred and the profane, bringing together poetic allusion (a discussion of the “Theirs not to reason why” couplet from Tennyson’s ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’) and vernacular speech (officers are called ‘Ruperts’, the Taliban are nicknamed ‘Terry’). But too often the poetic veers towards cliché, and the everyday speech of the enlisted men smacks of political correctness. In a recent court martial, a Royal Marine sergeant was reported as saying, “Shuffle off this mortal coil, you cunt,” as he executed an injured Afghan insurgent. It speaks volumes about the war. Unfortunately, the writing in *The Patrol* never quite manages to capture such casually refined brutality. Finally, the multi-ethnic patrol is tasked with training the Afghan National Army (ANA) and yet, except for some lacklustre banter between a Welsh soldier and a Londoner and one or two cutaways to the ANA looking anxious, nothing is made of this, a missed opportunity that weakens the film as a whole. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Tom Petch Tom Stuart	Company A Tom Petch film	Ginge Oliver Mott Stab
Written by Tom Petch	Cast Nav Sidhu Smudge	Claire Morton medic
Director of Photography Stuart Bentley	Ben Righton Captain Bill	Tom Petch Judge Advocate
Editor Luke Deverill	Richardson Owain Arthur Taff	In Colour [1.85:1]
Music James McWilliam Nick Crofts	Nicholas Beveney Sergeant ‘Sol’ Campbell	Distributor Soda Pictures
Production Sound Recordist Stephen Thomas	Daniel Fraser Lieutenant Johnny Bradshaw	
©AFG Film Ltd Production	Alex McNally	

Helmand province, Afghanistan, 2006. British troops are helping to train the Afghan National Army by conducting patrols in enemy territory. Expecting to return to base, a group of soldiers receive orders that they must remain in the field. After 11 days, with food and ammunition running out and morale low, Welsh soldier Taff is shot in the chest and evacuated by helicopter. The men express their anger at the poor quality of their equipment and question the purpose of their mission. After 15 days, the men learn that Taff has died of his wounds. In an ambush, one of their vehicles is destroyed by an IED; the next day, the patrol’s medic refuses to fight. Increasingly desperate, the men, including Lieutenant Jonathan Bradshaw, who has just received news that he has become a father, mutiny against the commanding officer and withdraw back to base.

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty

USA/Australia/United Kingdom/Canada 2013
Director: Ben Stiller, Certificate PG 114m 22s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

Ben Stiller’s films as director, especially *Reality Bites* (1994) and *Zoolander* (2001), have all sent up contemporary pop culture; most, however, have also involved a reckoning with the baby-boom generation, notably *The Cable Guy* (1996), whose villain represents the boomers’ television-weaned children, but also *Tropic Thunder* (2008), whose targets include the mythologising of the Vietnam War. Except for a couple of slightly jarring references to *The Matrix* (1999) and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008), *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* marks Stiller’s abandonment of the obsessive concern for pop-cultural minutiae that characterised his earlier films, and the advent of a full-blown nostalgia for post-war masscult.

As per the title, Stiller’s Walter Mitty, an introverted *Life* magazine photo editor, is prone to fantasising, usually about winning the heart of work colleague Cheryl (Kristen Wiig), sometimes in ways that suggest an imagination shaped by superhero movies. But this aspect of his personality by no means dominates the film. *Life* – and the wordplay doesn’t stop here – is coming to an end, and with it all the craft values associated with what Dwight Macdonald excoriated in 1960 as “a typical homogenized magazine... degrading the serious rather than elevating the frivolous”. Walter often works with an intrepid photographer, Sean O’Connell (Sean Penn), whom he has never met, and who lives the life he dreams of. When the negative for the final cover – Sean is old-school – goes missing, Walter stops dreaming and starts living, heading for Greenland, Iceland and even Afghanistan to punch sharks, dodge lava and bribe warlords.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Samuel Goldwyn Jr John Goldwyn Stuart Cornfield Ben Stiller	Sound Mixer Danny Michael Costume Designer Sarah Edwards	Brazil, Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain)
Screen Story and Screenplay Steven Conrad Based on the short story by James Thurber	Director of Photography Stuart Dryburgh	Production Companies Twentieth Century Fox presents in association with TSG Entertainment a Samuel Goldwyn Films/Red Hour Films production
Film Editor Greg Hayden	Production Designer Jeff Mann	Produced in association with New Line Cinema
Music Theodore Shapiro	Production	A Ben Stiller film Made in association with Ingenious Media
		Produced in association with Big Screen Productions and

New York, the present. On his 42nd birthday, ‘Life’ magazine photo editor Walter Mitty receives from elusive photographer Sean O’Connell a wallet inscribed with the ‘Life’ motto (“To see things thousands of miles away...”) and a selection of negatives. On the same day, it is announced that ‘Life’ is to cease operating as a print publication. Ted Hendricks, manager of the magazine’s transition to digital-only, wants O’Connell’s 25th frame, representing the “quintessence of life”, for the cover of the final issue. It is, however, missing.

Walter’s attempts to track down O’Connell bring him into contact with Cheryl Melhoff, a colleague whom he had previously been trying to reach through a dating website. Partly to impress her, he flies to Greenland in search of O’Connell and the missing negative. A

There is much to overlook. Stiller’s swift transition from nebbish to hunk, at the end of which he is complimented as a combination of Indiana Jones and the lead singer of The Strokes (just the first of those will do, thanks), recalls nothing more than the moment in the proverbial teen movie when the nerdy girl takes off her glasses. The Afghanistan business, which involves light mockery of local customs, is iffy. There is product placement galore. And the scenes in which Walter rediscovers his backpacking, skateboarding roots, to a wall-to-wall soundtrack of happy-clappy guitar music, exhibit an unfortunate kinship with another globetrotting, post-frat-pack, carpe-diem movie, *The Big Year* (2011).

For all that, *Walter Mitty* is handsomely shot by Stuart Dryburgh, who has previously worked with Jane Campion and Michael Mann. The landscapes are spectacular, in the end overwhelming both the soundtrack and the trite travel agent’s pitch embodied in the narrative. The New York scenes’ long perspectives occasionally echo *The Apartment* (1960), a comparison emphasised by the presence of Shirley MacLaine as Walter’s mother, but they are by contrast shamelessly romantic, evoking a world that is no more and never really was, but which nonetheless has a certain appeal. The *Life* offices, standing for more than the magazine, give Stiller and Dryburgh ample opportunity to play with blown-up images of 20th-century icons, which are eventually unceremoniously taken out to the trash. This too is, despite Macdonald and everything else, finally effective. Perhaps, unexpectedly, Stiller has proven himself an apt eulogiser. **S**

Down Productions With the participation of the Province of British Columbia Production Services Tax Credit, Ontario Media Development Corporation – Film and Television Tax Credits	Cast Ben Stiller Walter Mitty Kristen Wiig Cheryl Melhoff Shirley MacLaine Edna Mitty Adam Scott Ted Hendricks Kathryn Hahn Odessa Mitty Patton Oswalt Todd Maher Adrian Martinez Hernando Ólafur Darri Ólafsson helicopter pilot Sean Penn Sean O’Connell Jonathan C. Daly	Tim Naughton Terence Bernie Hines Gary Mannheim Paul Fitzgerald Don Proctor
Executive Producers Gore Verbinski Meyer Gottlieb G. Mac Brown	Film Extracts <i>The Ten Commandments</i> (1956) <i>Stripes</i> (1981)	Dolby Atmos/ Datasat In Colour [2.35:1]
		Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK)
		10,293 ft +0 frames

further lead takes him by trawler to Iceland, narrowly escaping death by shark and volcano. He flies home when the job of his assistant is threatened. However, when he arrives, both of them are sacked, and Cheryl with them. Despondent, Walter discards the wallet.

Walter then discovers from his mother that O’Connell is in Afghanistan. He finds him in the Himalayas, only to be told that the 25th frame was in the wallet. Fortunately Walter’s mother noticed him throwing it out and retrieved it. Walter gives the negative to Hendricks without knowing what it represents. Walter and Cheryl see it together on the day the last issue of ‘Life’ is published, which is also the day Walter asks Cheryl out on a date: it is an image of Walter himself.

12 Years a Slave

USA/Luxembourg/United Kingdom 2013

Director: Steve McQueen

Certificate 15 133m 55s

Reviewed by Calum Marsh

See feature
on page 28

"You see, style..." director Steve McQueen reflected during a recent interview. "No, I'm not interested in that." Form, he insisted, must follow function. And yet the evidence of his

career suggests otherwise. Before he made his first foray into feature filmmaking with *Hunger* in 2008, McQueen already boasted an impressive reputation as a visual artist, and had long been praised precisely for the virtuosity and vigour of his technique. Indeed, in 1999 he was awarded the Turner Prize on the strength of *Drumroll*, a three-channel, 22-minute video installation shot with a specialised camera of his own invention – a piece whose formal audacity is typical of his work in both fields.

McQueen's latest and best film, *12 Years a Slave*, is likewise possessed of a conspicuous formalism, and, although he may not approve of the assessment, it confirms his status as one of British cinema's most accomplished visual stylists – a distinction that is not without its detractors. While not exactly ostentatious, McQueen does tend to operate in a somewhat decadent register, furnishing his productions with the sort of high-minded embellishments you might expect of an artist accustomed to the requisite panache of modern art. His is a decidedly high style – every image has been precisely calibrated, tailored to fit a consonant aesthetic. There are those who regard this tendency as of rather dubious merit. Do the painterly compositions and dexterous long takes with which McQueen's films unfailingly come equipped betray their author's need to merely show off, as some critics have argued?

I'd argue that while such dismissals may have been appropriate following the release of 2011's sophomore feature *Shame* – an admittedly minor effort too trivial to justify its egregiously self-serious tenor – they haven't any validity now. *12 Years a Slave* proves McQueen's formal prowess and, more significantly, his utter seriousness as a dramatist. An adaptation of Solomon Northup's 19th-century memoirs, it follows, as its title implies, more than a decade in the life of a once-free black man from New York, kidnapped and sold into slavery in the plantation fields of Louisiana. Of course, the subject, by virtue of its severity and its pointed absence in contemporary popular culture, demands a degree of sensitivity from an audience, which I suspect is why many have approached it warily – the veracity and magnitude of the trauma being dealt with doubtless do some of the emotional heavy lifting. But McQueen, far from exploiting the solemnity inherent in this material, elucidates an uncompromising vision. The film earns the impression of gravity because McQueen puts in the work required to thoughtfully and intelligently convey it.

This intelligence makes itself clear in the construction of the narrative. The story is simple. Northup (Chiwetel Ejiofor), a well-educated carpenter and part-time violinist, is persuaded to join two travelling musicians on a tour of the southern states while his wife and two children venture out of town. It transpires that these men intend to sell Northup into slavery, and soon enough he finds himself beaten and chained, en



Chain-sore: Michael Fassbender, Lupita Nyong'o, Chiwetel Ejiofor

route to a plantation owned by Ford (Benedict Cumberbatch). Midway through the film, Northup is sold by Ford to a slaver named Epps (Michael Fassbender), but otherwise the action is static: most of the film's 134-minute running time is dedicated to the daily rhythms of Northup's unchanging life in servitude, where the brutality of the world seems inexhaustible and nobody is afforded even a moment of safety or repose. It's to McQueen's credit that this experience is articulated with such uncommon inflexibility. His strategy is one of persistence: he intends to show the reality of slavery not by fleeting suggestion, but by a campaign to exhaust and overwhelm. The title tells us that Northup will be a slave for 12 years. McQueen makes it feel as if it could be forever.

When McQueen professes that he remains uninterested in style, I think what he means is that he isn't interested in style for its own

sake. His technical proficiency, his skill as a craftsman, has been marshalled in service of the story, illustrating the drama artfully, yes, but never indecorously. *12 Years a Slave*, like *Hunger* and *Shame* before it, contains much to admire aesthetically. Take, for instance, the near-lynching of Northup at the hands of a sadistic farmhand named Tibbeats (Paul Dano), which McQueen shoots as a punishing long take from the distance. The shot is a marvel, certainly, but it has a clear purpose: it aims to impress upon the audience the *feeling* of the crisis, its length and intensity. *12 Years* does not care to showboat; its defining quality is rigour, which it needs to convey real pain. Its formalism is directed at an emotional truth, one that resonates because McQueen is committed to it unflinchingly. This is Solomon Northup's story. But in its conviction and style, this is very much Steve McQueen's film. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Brad Pitt
Dede Gardner
Jeremy Kleiner
Bill Pohlad
Steve McQueen
Arnon Milchan
Anthony Katagas
Screenplay
John Ridley
Director of Photography
Sean Bobbitt
Editor
Joe Walker
Production Designer

Adam Stockhausen
Music
Hans Zimmer
Production
Sound Mixer
Kirk Francis
Costume Designer
Patricia Norris

@Regency
Entertainment
(USA) Inc. and Bass
Films, LLC (in the
United States)
©Bass Films, LLC
and Monarchy

Enterprises S.a.r.l. (in
the rest of the world)
Production
Companies
Regency Enterprises
and River Road
Entertainment
present a River Road,
Plan B and New
Regency production in
association with Film4
A film by Steve
McQueen
Executive Producers
Tessa Ross
John Ridley

Cast

Chiwetel Ejiofor
Solomon Northup
Michael Fassbender
Edwin Epps
Benedict Cumberbatch
Ford
Paul Dano
Tibbeats
Garrett Dillahunt
Armsby
Paul Giamatti
Freeman
Scoot McNairy

Brown
Lupita Nyong'o
Patsey
Adepero Oduye
Eliza
Sarah Paulson
Mistress Epps
Brad Pitt
Bass
Michael Kenneth
Williams
Robert
Alfre Woodard
Mistress Shaw
Chris Chalk
Clemens

Taran Killam
Hamilton
Bill Camp
Radburn

Dolby Digital/
Datasat
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
E1 Films

12,052 ft +8 frames

New York, 1841. Solomon Northup is a carpenter and violinist, living comfortably with his wife and children. As his family prepares to leave town for the season, Solomon is persuaded to accompany two musicians on tour. One evening Solomon falls ill, and awakens the next morning in chains. Viciously beaten by his captors, Solomon is shipped to New Orleans, where he is given the name Platt and resold to plantation owner Ford. Solomon quickly proves himself talented and hardworking, qualities that endear him to Ford. However, he also attracts the attention

of brutal overseer Tibbeats, who is determined to break his will. The two men fight and, when Solomon gains the upper hand, Tibbeats threatens revenge. Recognising that Solomon is in danger, Ford sells him to nearby slaver Epps, a sadistic drunk. After years in captivity, Solomon meets a carpenter named Bass, newly hired at the Ford plantation and a vocal opponent of the slave trade. Solomon implores Bass to give news of his whereabouts to his family, who eventually send help. After more than a decade, Solomon returns to his family and to freedom.

The Wolf of Wall Street

Director: Martin Scorsese
Certificate 18 179m 55s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The acronym is, appropriately, WOWS. *The Wolf of Wall Street* is a film of yuppie pastels in the bright light of the world's vacation spots, so crisp as to seem slightly unreal. It's three hours of wall-to-wall bunga-bunga partying, with orgiastic excess that evokes Jay-Z's 'Big Pimpin' music video, Bob Guccione, John Casablancas, von Stroheim and Cecil B. DeMille.

Stockbroker Jordan Belfort, the 'wolf' of the title (played by Leonardo DiCaprio), thrives as master of ceremonies in a milieu where the only self that matters is the performed self. Like a great number of Scorsese protagonists with whom he otherwise wouldn't seem to have much in common, including Travis Bickle and Rupert Pupkin, Jordan only exists when validated in the eyes of the world. The offices of Stratton Oakmont aren't just a workplace for Jordan, but his own private public theatre, a place where he can stalk the boards, reassuring himself of his own success by re-enacting the legend of it. When preparing to step down in return for clemency from the Securities and Exchange Commission, Jordan reneges in front of his office – he realises that if he ceases to be Stratton Oakmont, he ceases to be. When Jordan's lieutenant Donnie Azoff (Jonah Hill, wearing bleached teeth and playing a version of Jordan's real-life accomplice Danny Porush) needs to prove a point, he makes a soapbox of the nearest handy desk and acts out his power play in full view of the 'wolf pit', eating one hapless employee's goldfish, or pissing on a subpoena. With the offices the scene of many a group grope, even sex isn't private.

Jordan is a born bullshitter and, like many bullshitters, he has the gift of inspiring supreme confidence. In the business of selling speculation, talk is the coin of the realm, and *The Wolf of Wall Street* is enamoured of palaver, from the Texas smooth talk of Matthew McConaughey, playing Jordan's mentor Mark Hanna, to the blue-collar New York Jewish patter of Rob Reiner as Jordan's towering, hotheaded father. Loaded with thrilling verbal runs, this film is the nearest thing to a pure comedy that Scorsese has made since 2006's *The Departed*. Based on Belfort's own memoir and written for the screen by Terence Winter, *Wolf* lacks *The Departed*'s suspense-making genre architecture. The film is essentially a chain of anecdotes: Jordan interrogating his gay butler for money that went missing during a sex party; Jordan using the family of friends to transfer money into Swiss bank accounts; Jordan's yacht capsizing when crossing the Mediterranean in a mad rush to retrieve the money from those same accounts. Along with its three-hour runtime, this baggy plotting may make *Wolf* a somewhat harder sell to audiences but it's a deeper movie than *The Departed* – among the best that Scorsese has made.

The comedy here isn't only verbal but also physical, and it's in this department that DiCaprio's performance enters the realm of the undeniable. There's his rubber-torsoed dancing at his wedding party, much giffed since appearing in the film's trailer, and the elaborate seduce-and-stick-it-in pantomime he enacts while illustrating how to high-pressure sell a cold call via speakerphone. As McConaughey's character makes explicit in an initiation that hangs over the entire film,



The culler of money: Jonah Hill, Leonardo DiCaprio, Margot Robbie, Jon Bernthal

sexual release is only a means to prime the pump so as to make more money – the Stratton Oakmont gang even equate different classes of prostitutes with different grades of stocks.

One elaborate physical comedy set piece is the movie's hysterical high point. It involves Jordan and Donnie incapacitated by elephant-tranquiliser-grade 'Lemmon 714' Quaaludes in a moment of crisis that demands fast action and quick thinking. The sight of Jordan desperately trying to get back home, wriggling on his belly towards his Lamborghini Countach and opening the passenger-side scissor door with his foot, made this critic laugh harder than anything else in films in the past year. When drugged Jordan intercepts drugged Donnie during an ill-advised incriminating phone call, both men wind up flailing at one another on the ground, speech slurred, tangled in the telephone cord,

looking like nothing so much as two newborns in a playpen – which, of course, they are, except that the playpen is seven acres on the Gold Coast of Long Island, Jay Gatsby country, the most expensive real estate in the world.

Jordan has a nobler conception of himself. Introducing the shoe designer Steve Madden, whose company Stratton Oakmont is about to take public, Jordan identifies Madden as an artist, the artist's gift being that he "creates trends". By Jordan's own definition, then, his market manipulation is a variety of artistry – and the scenes where Jordan rallies his bullpen to do his bidding are unexpectedly touching in their evocation of the esprit de corps among business-world brigands. Like *The Wolf of Wall Street*, they are at once energising and enervating, the very centre of a movie that fairly reeks with the sweet stench of success. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Martin Scorsese
Leonardo DiCaprio
Riza Aziz
Joey McFarland
Emma Koskoff
Screenplay
Terence Winter
Based on the book
by Jordan Belfort
**Director of
Photography**
Rodrigo Prieto
Edited by
Thelma Schoonmaker
Production Designer
Bob Shaw
Sound Mixer
James Sabat
Costume Designer
Sandy Powell

**Production
Companies**
Paramount Pictures
and Red Granite
Pictures present
an Appian Way,
Sikelia and EMJAG
production
A Martin
Scorsese film
Executive Producers
Alexandra Milchan
Rick Yorn
Irwin Winkler
Joel Gotler
Georgia Kacandes
Cast
Leonardo DiCaprio
Jordan Belfort
Jonah Hill
Donnie Azoff
Margot Robbie
Naomi Lapaglia
Matthew
McConaughey
Mark Hanna
Jon Favreau
Manny Riskin
Kyle Chandler
Patrick Denham
Rob Reiner
Max Belfort
Jean Dujardin
Jean-Jacques Saurel

**Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS
In Colour**
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Eire

16.192 ft +8 frames

New York City, the late 80s. Jordan Belfort, who comes from a middle-class background in Queens, starts working on Wall Street and learns the unscrupulous tricks of the trade from his superior Mark Hanna. After the Black Monday crash of 1987, Jordan loses his job trading blue-chip stocks and is reduced to selling trash 'pink sheet' penny stocks from an office on Long Island. These prove immensely profitable, however, and Jordan decides to start his own business, bringing his old neighbourhood friends in on the scam, as well as Donnie Azoff, who becomes his right-hand man. Naming his company Stratton Oakmont, Jordan sets out to defraud wealthier investors and becomes immensely rich. He marries second wife Naomi, a model from Brooklyn. He embarks on new, more audacious scams, including helping the Steve Madden shoe company – of which he owns the majority of stock via proxy – to go public. Learning that he's attracted the unwanted attention of the regulators, Jordan begins to stash money away in a Swiss bank account. After his yacht sinks in a last-ditch effort to retrieve that money, Jordan quits trading but is ultimately jailed for his transgressions. When we last see him, he is working as a motivational speaker in New Zealand.

GLASGOW FILM FESTIVAL

20 FEBRUARY – 2 MARCH 2014

GLASGOW YOUTH FILM FESTIVAL: 2–12 FEBRUARY
GLASGOW SHORT FILM FESTIVAL: 13–16 FEBRUARY



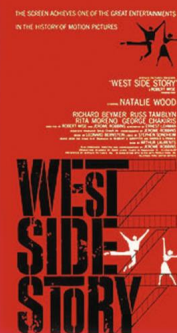
We turn 10
this year –
come & help
us celebrate!

Expect a great
line-up of
films, guests &
unique pop-up
cinema.

Tickets go on sale Friday 24 January – WWW.GLASGOWFILM.ORG/FESTIVAL



Copland
Steiner
Gershwin
Herrmann
Waxman
Bernstein



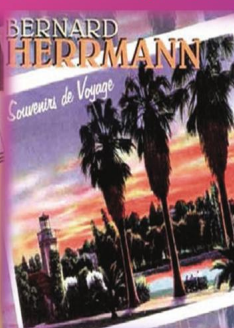
Hollywood Film Composers

The Nash Ensemble

Saturday 15 February at 6pm & 7.30pm

Wigmore Hall

020 7935 2141 / wigmore-hall.org.uk



30 YEARS
350 ISSUES
25,000 PAGES

Adventures In Time Travel

thewire.co.uk



London Academy
established since 1996

Media Film TV

Now enrolling – part-time evening, day or weekend

Learn production skills

- Camera + Lighting
- Avid Media Composer
- Film Making
- Screen Writing
- Film Editing
- Production Management
- Film Producer
- Final Cut Pro X
- TV Production

Get your career moving with over 75 courses:

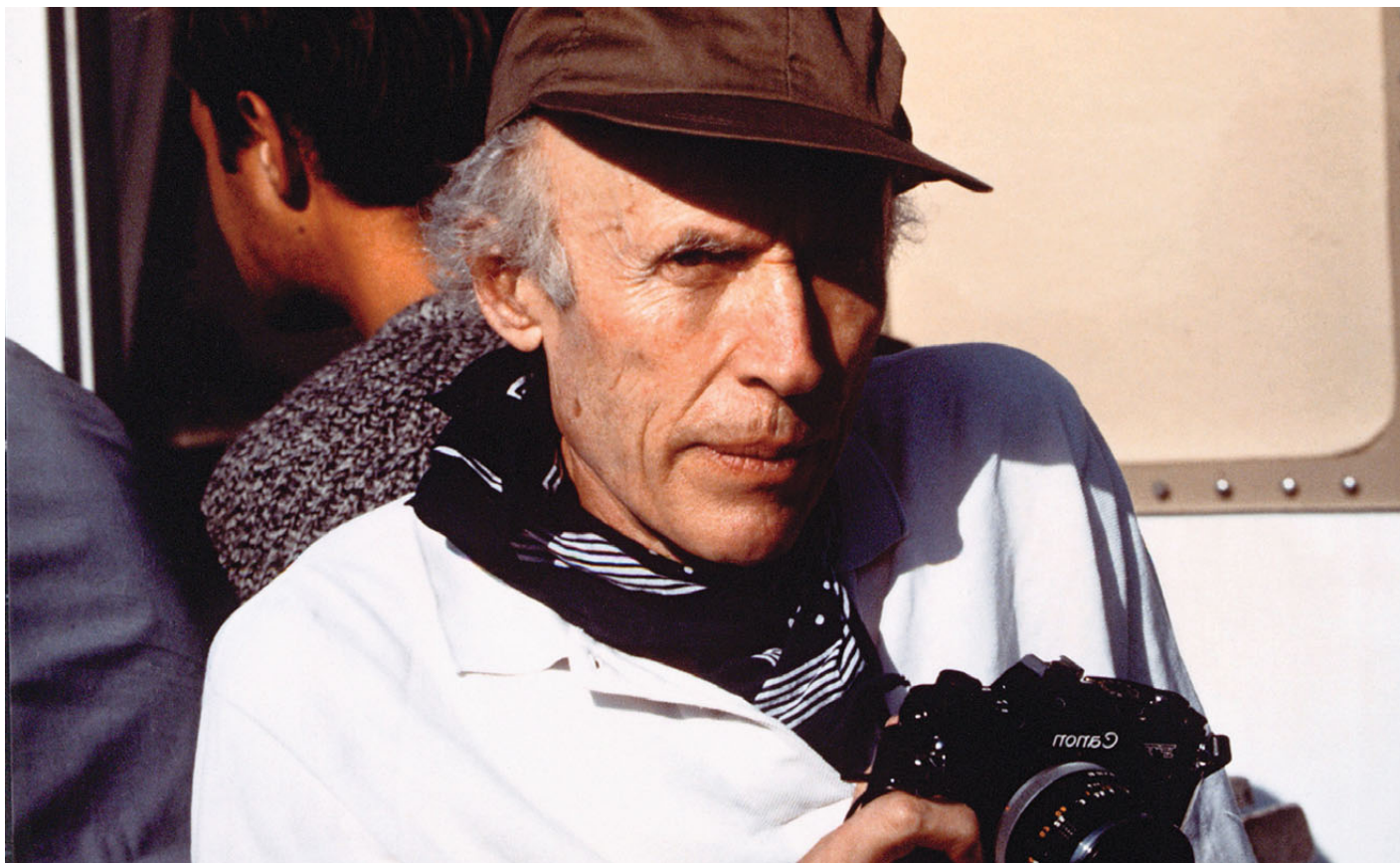
- Acting ● Film ● Make-up ● Photography
- TV Presenter ● TV Production ● Radio + Voice
- Adobe ● Avid ● FCPx

0207 138 2909

www.media-courses.com



Home cinema



Man for all seasons: Eric Rohmer

THIS CHARMING MAN

Eric Rohmer is known as a director of exquisitely subtle conversation pieces. But as a major new release reminds us, he was so much more

THE COMPLETE ERIC ROHMER

France 1959-2007; Potemkine/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 1.33:1; Features: 24 features, nine shorts (including two unreleased short films), interviews, making-of featurettes, 'Cinéma, de notre temps' interview with Rohmer, 'En compagnie d'Eric Rohmer', English subtitles, 100-page booklet

Reviewed by Geoff Andrew

Of the five critics turned filmmakers who were the most famous members of the *nouvelle vague*, it's still probably Eric Rohmer who's widely regarded as the most easily categorisable. The careers of Truffaut and Chabrol were uneven, Rivette always felt difficult to pin down, and Godard's penchant for protean shifts of focus and form left many early admirers bemused by what he was up to. Rohmer, conversely, appeared uncommonly consistent, repeatedly returning in his three great series ('Six Moral Tales', 'Comedies and Proverbs' and 'Tales of the Four Seasons') to much the same situations, themes and stylistic tropes. From *La Collectionneuse* (1967) and *My Night*

at *Maud's* (*Ma nuit chez Maud*, 1969) through to *A Summer's Tale* (*Conte d'été*, 1996) and *An Autumn Tale* (*Conte d'automne*, 1998), what we got were small groups of young, youngish or young-feeling French folk interacting – mostly through loquacious conversation, though also, sometimes, through physical congress of one kind or another – often while on holiday or during a break from the daily routine. For some, the decidedly intimate, modest scale of the drama on offer lacked cinematic excitement; for others, these were exquisitely subtle conversation pieces, the low-key naturalism of the performances and the discreet ironies and ambiguities of the dialogue evidence of a highly distinctive brand of filmic realism.

But as any self-respecting Rohmer nut knows, and as this comprehensive (but not quite complete) collection of his work shows to glorious effect, the truth is more complicated than either of these assessments. True, most of Rohmer's features fit the aforementioned mould so well that it's as easy to recognise them immediately as his as it is with an Ozu film. There are others, however, which – initially, at least – don't look like his work at all, most notably *Perceval* (*Perceval le Gallois*, 1978), shot entirely on highly artificial studio sets inspired

by Renaissance paintings, with the dialogue sung or spoken in rhyme. (Moreover, many lines are descriptive, with characters telling us what they're doing as we see them doing it, thus reminding us of the existence of Chrétien de Troyes's original text.) Still, note that "initially": for all its delight in conspicuous artifice, *Perceval* – one of the writer-director's finest achievements, as brilliant in its own way as *My Night at Maud's* and *The Green Ray* (*Le Rayon vert*, 1986) – remains utterly Rohmeresque in its careful charting of the naive protagonist's education in matters of love, beauty, responsibility and truth. (He even learns the wisdom of not talking too much.)

In each of the other historical dramas he adapted from literature or based on true stories (*The Marquise of O*, *The Lady and the Duke*, *Triple Agent* and *The Romance of Astrea and Celadon*), Rohmer sought to depict the world as it might have been imagined or understood by the tale's authors, readers or participants. (In the last film this was particularly challenging: the source was a 17th-century work set in a rather fanciful fifth-century Gaul populated by swains, nymphs and druids.) Inevitably, given the resources required for period drama, several of these were 'bigger' pictures than the inexpensive if meticulously mounted films that made up the three series.

At the other end of the spectrum, Rohmer also made, through La Compagnie Eric Rohmer (CER, set up with producer Françoise Etchegaray in the mid-1980s), several still 'smaller', partly improvised films (*The Green Ray*, *Four Adventures of Reinette and Mirabelle*, *The Tree*, *the Mayor and the Mediatheque*, *Rendezvous in Paris*), not to mention more than a dozen shorts conceived and written by or featuring young actors and technicians from his regular *équipe* or of his acquaintance.

Usually slight, amusing and even, in the case of five anecdotes centred on the actress Rosette, a little rough-and-ready, these brief *atelier* works clearly display his influence, partly because Rohmer himself – credited not with *réalisation* or *mise en scène* but merely with *découpage* – worked on the shooting script and shot them, partly because many boast in their cast *rohrmériens* like Pascal Gregory, Marie Rivière, Arielle Dombasle and Féodor Atkine. One suspects that Rohmer participated in these films because he wanted to help his protégés, because it was fun (in one interview Gregory tells of how making *The Tree*... felt like a kind of game) and because he regarded some of them as sketches through which he could work out ideas for his own features. It was no accident, surely, that one group of films, packaged here under the title 'Le Modèle', focuses on the relationship between life and art.

Indeed, if one examines Rohmer's entire onscreen oeuvre, including the shorts, the many documentaries and a couple of televised plays (*Catherine de Heilbronn*, a record of his 1979 stage production of a Kleist play, and *Le Trio en mi bémol*, written and directed for the medium in 1987), one finds him repeatedly reworking the same territory. It's far more than his lifelong fascination with the relationship between the sexes (he was, after all, one of the original *hitchcocko-hawksiens*); there's also his enduring and extremely erudite interest in art and architecture, literature and philosophy, tradition and modernity, the relationship of work and leisure, the specificities of time and place.

Missing from this near-complete set are many of the educational documentaries Rohmer made for television in the mid-1960s – while his excellent films on Louis Lumière and Carl Dreyer are included, we're denied equally interesting and relevant films on Perceval and the Grail, Poe, Pascal (crucial to *My Night at Maud's*) and the changing French landscape. Still, we do get to see that the new-town settings of features such as *Full Moon in Paris* (*Les Nuits de la pleine lune*, 1984) and *My Girlfriend's Boyfriend* (*L'Ami de mon amie*, 1987) were presaged by the 1975 television documentary series *Ville nouvelle*, that the dramatically illuminating dance sequences in many later features were anticipated by a nightclub scene in his early updating of Tolstoy, *La Sonate à Kreutzer* (1956); and that the *vigneronne* in *Autumn Tale* has an ancestor of sorts, subject of the documentary *Fermière à Montfaucon* (1967).

This sense of continuity extends to Rohmer's enduring predilection for strong, eloquent, opinionated women: students, shop assistants, farmers, teachers, writers, painters, even a few aristocrats, all credibly complex beings ready,



A winter's tale: *My Night at Maud's*

willing and able to express and discuss their thoughts, needs, desires and anxieties. Here, as in all aspects of his work, Rohmer achieves a remarkable balancing of variety and consistency. Despite the range of subjects and means of expression (he wrote a great deal too, of course) and notwithstanding his ability to intrigue and surprise, there's really nothing that feels like the work of someone else. Most bizarre are two pop-promos, *Bois ton café* and the supremely kitschy *Amour symphonique*, and the 1989 TV drama *Les Jeux de société*. But even the former illustrate ditties by *rohrmériennes* – coquettish Rosette accompanied by a seemingly ill-at-ease Gregory, and Dombasle warbling operatically in a series of outlandish gowns and settings – while the latter, a series of sketches depicting games of the past, is a literary-historical confection that not only parades several regulars (including Gregory again, here singing merrily away) but anticipates *The Lady and the Duke* and *Astrea and Celadon* in certain respects.

Rohmer's preference was to make *unfilm des copains* – a term applied by Gregory to *The Tree*, *the Mayor and the Mediatheque*, a key work (despite its comparative obscurity) since its blend of

Notwithstanding his ability to intrigue and surprise, there's really nothing that feels like the work of someone else

scripted fiction, improvisation and documentary touches on so many of Rohmer's abiding preoccupations – and he worked time and again with the same actors, producers and creative personnel. Unsurprising, then, that the extras in this set include many affectionate, insightful interviews (those with Gregory, Fabrice Luchini and Etchegaray are the best of a very fine lot) as well as several making-ofs, a lengthy *Cinéma, de notre temps* interview with Rohmer conducted by Jean Douchet, several shorter interviews, TV programmes and *En compagnie d'Eric Rohmer*, a touching home-movie portrait by Marie Rivière, whose many appearances for him peaked when she co-authored and took the lead in the largely improvised *The Green Ray*. Her film seems to have been shot not long before he died in 2010, aged 89; visibly frail, he nevertheless appears as young at heart as ever, sharp in his insights, wit and ability to quote at the drop of a hat, faintly dandyish in his garb, and ever ready to joke and sing along with Luchini, Dombasle and Rivière.

Indeed, one of the great joys of this marvellous celebration of Rohmer's work – and besides the omission of the aforementioned documentary shorts, the only real disappointments are that the many superb extras don't have English subtitles and that the final three features (not restored, unlike their 21 predecessors) are not available on Blu-ray – is the opportunity it provides to observe the man himself. He's a constant presence: in his early films (he took the lead in both *Bérénice* and *La Sonate à Kreutzer* – and yes, we do get to see him on the dancefloor!), in cameos for Rivette and Luc Moullet, and in the ample actuality footage. He may, as Gregory and others point out, have been unusually, almost obsessively secretive about his domestic life, keeping it private even from the alternative family of his closest collaborators. Regarding his work, however, he could hardly have been more open; as the interviews here show, he knew exactly what he was doing and why, and would talk about it with a rare and modest honesty. Not to mention a garrulous but extraordinarily precise eloquence. But then, what else would one expect? 🍷

Available from www.potemkine.fr, €199.90



Above: *Perceval*, which delights in artifice yet is also completely Rohmeresque

New releases

BABY PEGGY: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Vera Iwrebör; USA 2013; Milestone Film & Video/Region 0 DVD; 54 minutes; 16:9; Features: slideshow, restored shorts ('Carmen, Jr.', 'Peg o' the Mounted', 'Such Is Life') and feature 'Captain January'

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

In this bittersweet documentary, former child star Diana Serra Cary recalls symbolically burying 'Baby Peggy' at her father's steeply mortgaged ranch in Wyoming at some point in the late 1920s. Seventy years later, she exhumed her former screen identity, writing an unflinching memoir of her Hollywood career and the way it destroyed her family, from her tyrannical Tom Mix-wannabe father to her cold-shouldered older sister. Cary also began searching for the 150-odd films she made as an infant: delightful movies that she had been told were worthless and of no interest once the sound era crashed in.

This film has two missions, then. First, to reclaim Cary's screen work, and rightly so: she was a remarkably natural and captivating performer. The clips in the documentary, and the films packaged with it, are a hoot. Cute without being cutesy, Baby Peggy was an exuberantly tomboyish comic heroine, stuttering through dance steps on pudgy toddler legs, exaggerating a wince as she pulls the trigger on a cap-gun or greedily chomping ice-cream from another child's glass. Cary has been hunting her own movies for years now, and screening them at silent film festivals and revival cinemas to rapturous applause.

The second mission is to tell the now familiar cautionary tale of the exploited, lonely star who epitomises the charms of childhood on screen while experiencing none of them for herself – and precious little of her wages either. As the film explains, Cary continues to champion a fairer deal for child actors.

Spotted at 19 months and a star by the time she would have been expected to start school, Cary supplied Hollywood with several years of hard graft before she was old enough to decide whether she wanted a life in the movies. Her glory days were followed by years on the Vaudeville circuit

after her father fell out with the studio, and the retreat to the ranch, where finally she went to school and thought she had escaped Hollywood. Bankruptcy forced a loathed and 'ladylike' comeback in the talkies – and before long Cary ran away from home with sister Louise to find freedom, husbands and redemption in the form of Catholicism and a second career as a writer.

Cary is one of precious few remaining figures who can tell us first-hand about the silent era. That she uses her platform here to demand better conditions for her successors as much as to share anecdotes and recount her own success is to her lasting credit.

Disc: The restored Baby Peggy shorts and the feature *Captain January* (1924) are a big attraction. The shorts are scored by Günter Buchwald and the longer film by Donald Sosin, who with vocalist Joanna Seaton provides a rendition of 'That's My Baby' to accompany a slideshow of images.

BUS STOP

Joshua Logan; USA 1956; 20th Century Fox/Region B Blu-ray; 96 minutes; 2.55:1; Features: trailers

Reviewed by Peter Tonguette

While his work is too rarely spoken of these days, no one can deny that former stage director Joshua Logan began his film career with a bang. "After seeing *Picnic*, which was his first film, and then *Bus Stop*," gushed François Truffaut in 1955, "I find Logan such a gifted filmmaker (in terms of directing actors, camerawork, screenplay amelioration, clarity) that I think the only way he could spoil a film would be on purpose."

Picnic is great but *Bus Stop* may be even greater. Drawn from a William Inge play (as was the earlier film), it stars Don Murray as Bo, a none too slick cowhand who has resolved to find female companionship while visiting Phoenix to go rodeo riding. He tells his friend Virgil (Arthur O'Connell) that he dreams of landing an "angel" rather than a "gal", so there is some irony when he finds himself besotted with buxom singer Cherie (Marilyn Monroe).

In the film's key sequence, Bo firmly shushes an ungovernable crowd at the saloon where

Cherie works so that she can finish singing 'That Old Black Magic'. Logan lingers on close-ups of the two amid their obstreperous environs. She is charmed by his excessive display of gentlemanliness but unmoved when he decides they ought to get married. "I'm gonna end up in Montana with nothing but him and a bunch of cows!" she exclaims, in one of many caustic putdowns. Yet Logan subtly defuses Cherie's concerns about Bo, who seems crazed in his determination to tie the knot with his "angel". While riding on a bus with Bo, Cherie tells a fellow passenger that she is the victim of an abduction – "You know, kidnapped" – but when the passenger glances back a few rows to get a glimpse of her purported captor, he looks harmless as he snoozes peacefully.

At the end of the day, Bo is simply after love, and Logan finds a neat metaphor for its elusiveness in Cherie, who is always slipping away and ducking out of sight. In another Logan masterpiece, it is emphasised that they are not the odd couple they at first seem. Cherie is the rare chanteuse who believes in temperance: in a lovely moment early on, she sips tea when she is supposed to be drinking whisky. No wonder an innocent like Bo picks her out from a crowd.

Disc: The film sparkles on Blu-ray.

CREEPSHOW

George A. Romero; USA 1982; Second Sight/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 118 minutes; 1.78:1; Features: making-of documentary, two audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes footage, original trailers, TV spots, stills

Reviewed by James Blackford

A collaboration between George Romero and Stephen King, *Creepshow* is an anthology film presenting five grisly yet comedic tales inspired by (and paying homage to) the notoriously outrageous EC horror comics of the 1950s.

Made after the success of *Dawn of the Dead*, and with many of the same Pittsburgh-based crew, *Creepshow* boasts glossier production values than previous Romero films and is marked by a lighter tone befitting its comic-book source material. Although it subsequently lacks the symbolic depth and apocalyptic fervour of the zombie films, it succeeds as a high-camp exercise in horror-comic stylisation. Romero successfully translates the visual language of the comic book (speech bubbles, narration through panels, garish backgrounds) into film format, and *Creepshow* boasts a gaudily effective, expressionistic visual style of deep primary colours that not only recalls EC comics but also the rococo imagery of Mario Bava's acclaimed 60s horror films.

Previously Romero had not worked with stars but here he casts several veteran character actors in roles that entirely match (and amplify) their established onscreen personas. Regular Romero collaborator Tom Savini also unleashes some suitably grotesque special makeup effects, especially in the final tale's gory climax, which sees cockroaches burst from E.G. Marshall's rotting corpse. Although slightly patchy ('Something to Tide You Over' is a highlight, while 'The Crate' drags), *Creepshow* deservedly became a commercial success upon its original release.



Angel delight: Marilyn Monroe as chanteuse Cherie in *Bus Stop*

FIGHT AND FLIGHT

One of cinema's first blockbusters, *Wings* depicted blood and guts on the ground and spectacular battle scenes in the skies

WINGS

William Wellman; USA 1927; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 144 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: 'Wings: Grandeur in the Sky', 'Restoring the Power and Beauty of Wings', 'Dogfight!'; booklet

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Even those hoping for the Academy to back an underdog this year will be aware that big films are often judged the best. The first recipient of the Best Picture Oscar, or Outstanding Production as it was deemed at the time, was an out-and-out blockbuster.

William Wellman's *Wings* (1927) powers through the final year of the Great War as experienced by a pair of small-town buddies-turned-fighter pilots: posh boy David (Richard Arlen) and puppyish, mechanically minded Jack (Charles 'Buddy' Rogers), whose chirpy catchphrase is "OK!" David and Jack are united by their friendship, and perfectly matched when it comes to both bravery and patriotism – but divided by a love rivalry. A supposed city sophisticate, Sylvia (the elegant Jobyna Ralston), has both lads dangling on a string, though she cares only for David. Meanwhile, Jack is pestered by the sledgehammer flirting strategies of girl-next-door Mary, played by an especially hyperactive Clara Bow.

Needless to say, the romantic problems of boisterous young things in small-town USA don't amount to a hill of beans in 1917. A doomladen intertitle informs us that: "Over the world hung a cloud which spread and spread until its shadow fell in some degree on every living person." It is a benchmark of *Wings'* endearing absence of subtlety that this card, hardly cryptic in its wording, is illustrated by black clouds swamping the screen and followed by the word "WAR" printed in flaming block capitals.

Gamely, David and Jack make their goodbyes and enlist, thereby defending freedom, extricating themselves from any awkwardness with the opposite sex, and breaking bread on *Wings'* feast of breathtaking aerial combat scenes.

Wings thrives in the air: vistas of sky littered with aircraft, swooping, blasting and chasing each other, will send your jaw plummeting to earth. Motor-cranked cameras perched in the cockpits of the biplanes capture our heroes in flight, as well as the gruesome final seconds of many a sacrificial minor character, coughing up blood on their final inglorious nosedive.

Wellman and his crew were given a \$2 million budget and the run of a US airfield in San Antonio, Texas, for months at a time. Arlen could operate his own plane – he and Wellman had flown during the war. The other actors were given flying lessons,



Battling above and below: *Wings*, William Wellman's Oscar-winning vision of the Great War

while stunt pilots and ex-servicemen were drafted in to bolster the spectacle.

On the ground, as long as there is fighting to be done, *Wings* continues to impress. The film climaxes with the Big Push and the Battle of Saint-Mihiel. While David and Jack are sidetracked by their own tragedy, Wellman gives us blood and guts on the Western Front – panoramas of brutal hand-to-hand combat, troops falling back into the trenches they sprang from. In one grisly image, a soldier's corpse is striped by the shadows of his comrades marching past while an officer grinds the dead man's cigarette, still lit, into the mud beside him.

Back in 1927, with talkies in the offing, flagship screenings of *Wings* were mounted with not just an orchestral score but also synchronised sound

Vistas of sky littered with aircraft, swooping, blasting and chasing each other, will send your jaw plummeting to earth



Charles Rogers and Richard Arlen with Clara Bow

effects (whirring engines, crashing shells). There were visual effects too: flashes of orange and red dye to signify flames and gunfire (the same in-house Paramount process used to gild *Greed*).

On the lash during a furlough in Paris, Jack drunkenly hallucinates champagne bubbles as large as silver dollars, which are painted over the images of his off-duty debauchery – bouncing out of saucer-shaped glasses, wriggling loose from the sequins in Bow's floozie get-up. And all those bells and whistles are handsomely presented here.

Despite its Oscar glory, this historic movie was once believed missing in action, and the gleaming hi-def transfer on this sumptuous Blu-ray edition is the beneficiary of some hefty restoration work and digital prowess. There are some low-tech surprises too: a blistering cameo from Gary Cooper, whose sharp exit knocks a puff of can-do spirit out of our heroes' chests; a celebrated, tender deathbed kiss between the male leads; and a saucy pre-Code flash of nudity from Bow.

Bow herself is a bonus, in fact, as Paramount's hottest property was shoehorned into the movie via a rewrite. Her role, pursuing her sweetheart across the Atlantic, is largely thankless ("I'm just the whipped cream on top of the pie," she lamented) but her irrepressible vibrancy enlivens the non-battle scenes immeasurably. She provides the verve that Rogers and Arlen lack – outshining them in the comic and romantic sequences. It's a wonder no one thought to give her flying lessons too and see what daredevil skills she could muster up in the air.

Wings is presented with two music tracks – a new orchestration of the original J.S. Zamecnik music with recreated sound effects, and an alternative pipe organ score composed and played by Gaylord Carter. The generous booklet contains an essay by Gina Telaroli as well as archive articles and pictures. 📖

New releases

Disc: A clean, detailed high-definition presentation that boasts a suitably vibrant grade.

DARK DAYS

Marc Singer; USA 2000; Dogwoof/Region 2 DVD; Certificate E; 87 minutes; 1.78:1; Features: 'The Making of Dark Days' (2000), 'The Tunnel Today' Marc Singer revisits the tunnel in 2011, 'Fragile Dwelling' photo essay by Margaret Morton, 'Dark Days Design', 'Life After the Tunnel', trailer, Deleted scenes with notes by Marc Singer

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Dark Days focuses on a group of homeless people living in the New York subway. Director Marc Singer befriended them and, after living with them for a few months, decided to create a documentary with the aim of helping them financially. These characters' subterranean immersion is a pungent metaphor for the dramatic extent of urban American class and wealth disparity, but Singer avoids even the merest hint of polemicising. His non-judgemental approach becomes a political act in itself, definitively situating *Dark Days* away from the typically agency-free representation of the homeless population in mainstream media. By the time Amtrak officials step in and threaten to remove the group from the life they've become accustomed to, it's impossible not to be deeply emotionally involved.

Amazingly – but fully in keeping with the film's collectivist vibe – the subway dwellers took care of crew duties, rigging up lighting and Steadicam dollies, and learning to use the 16mm camera with black-and-white film. The result is an astonishing aesthetic triumph, with the forbidding environs stitched into a series of strikingly expressionistic chiaroscuro compositions. It's as though FW. Murnau had somehow found himself transported into a fetid Manhattan subway with full shooting kit. Underscoring the visuals are the deep, dubby reverberations of DJ Shadow's haunting score.

With its collection of added – and often very funny – oddballs shooting the breeze in an enclosed space, *Dark Days* at times resembles an off-kilter successor to Shirley Clarke's heroin-boho curio *The Connection* (1961). At others, it seems like sections of Ralph Ellison's classic novel of American fringe living *Invisible Man* (1952) made flesh – this connection becomes explicit when one character enthusiastically speaks of siphoning off free electricity to illuminate his spartan existence. But, though plugged into a lineage of extreme American counterculture, this moving, near-mythical film is a one-off.

Disc: A wealth of extra features and contextualising information.

FAR FROM VIETNAM

Chris Marker/Jean-Luc Godard/William Klein/Alain Resnais/Joris Ivens/Claude Lelouch/Agnès Varda; France 1967; Icarus Films/Region 0 DVD NTSC; 115 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: trailer, Marker's 1967 short 'The Sixth Side of the Pentagon'

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

It could be the most eloquent and incisive protest film ever made, for decades an unattainable Holy Grail for cinéastes and New Wave aficionados. This famous cataract of activism was intended as a cinematic intervention, delivered by a dream

team of hot New Wavers who, with a virtual army of sympathetic technicians, actors and producers, performed the equivalent of an angry cinematic peace march: the first documentary made in direct resistance to the US invasion of Vietnam.

Chris Marker edited it together *sans* auteurist attribution (indeed, Agnès Varda name's still there, but her contribution was all but edited out) and the movie blasts off as an eruption of fragments and declarations, ironic montages and torching news footage, Great Man satire and frank first-person confession, earnest North Vietnamese interviews and mocking visions of angry Americans. The mix includes self-condemning speeches from Hubert Humphrey and General William Westmoreland, folk satirist Tom Paxton singing 'Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation', a detailed stock-footage history of post-colonial Vietnam, footage of a 'traditional' North Vietnamese clown play about President Johnson weeping over his air force's failure, visitations with the American Home Front's vein-popping protests, interviews with Ho Chi Minh and Fidel Castro, portraits of Hanoi inhabitants as they manufacture and then employ one-man cement bomb shelters, and so on.

Typically, Jean-Luc Godard's segment inches beyond the others philosophically, as the filmmaker muses on camera about his conflicted relationship with sociopolitical injustice. "The best I can do," he says ruefully, unable to go to Hanoi, "is make cinema," though he's doubtful of its utility. (His hesitant, figurative solution, for us all, is to "instead, let them invade us.") The aggregate's hammer blow, however, comes with William Klein's segment about the legacy and surviving family of Norman Morrison, a 31-year-old Baltimore Quaker who in 1965 doused himself with kerosene outside the

Pentagon office of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and set himself ablaze. Grief doesn't prevent Morrison's serene pacifist widow from endorsing her husband's martyrdom, and Klein also makes it clear how much of a folk hero Morrison – renamed Mo Ri Xon – immediately became for the Vietnamese. Predictably dismissed in its day for being subjective, 'frantic' and frankly communist, *Far from Vietnam* remains not merely a movie but more of a fact of history itself.

Disc: Newly restored, this rough-hewn hand grenade is in the best shape seen anywhere since the Vietnam War ended. The accompanying Marker short, a wry first-hand portrait of the famous October 1967 anti-war march on the Pentagon, is also an essential historical document.

FIREWORKS WEDNESDAY

Asghar Farhadi; Iran 2006; Axiom/Region 2 DVD; 98 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: stills gallery, trailer

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

We've been getting Asghar Farhadi's films in reverse order. After the revelation that was the Oscar- and Golden Globe-winning *A Separation* (2011), his previous feature *About Elly* (2009) got a release here; and now, while we wait for his latest, *The Past* (screened at the LFF), to hit our cinemas, out on DVD comes the film that preceded *Elly*. Which leaves two earlier features (*Dancing in the Dust*, 2003, and *Beautiful City*, 2004) to reach us. But by now it's clear beyond any doubt: Farhadi's a filmmaker with his own very distinctive style, attitude and preoccupations.

The action of *Fireworks Wednesday* (as you might guess from the title) unrolls during a single day: the Wednesday before the spring solstice that ushers in the Iranian New Year, when, in accord with ancient Zoroastrian tradition, people light bonfires and let off fireworks in the street.



Fireworks Wednesday Farhadi is a filmmaker with his very own distinctive style, attitude and preoccupations, always alert to nuances of class and generation

Rouhi, a sweet slightly naive young woman, engaged to be married (Taraneh Alidoosti, who took the title role in *About Elly*), works for an employment agency which sends her to do a day's cleaning in the apartment of a middle-class couple. She arrives to find the flat looking like a typhoon's hit, and the couple (wife Mojdeh and husband Morteza) embroiled in a vicious row. And from here on, things get worse.

Here, as in *A Separation*, Farhadi doesn't take sides, leaving us to make up our own minds. At first we feel sorry for Rouhi, put upon and bewildered; and we might take Mojdeh, who has quarrelled with most of her own family, as a paranoid ball-breaker, constantly diving into the bathroom to clamp her ear to the ventilator shaft, avid for gossip. But as we learn more about these people, we start seeing other perspectives. None of them is blameless.

And as in his two later films, Farhadi is always alert to nuances of class and generation. Like Elly and Razieh (the working-class woman hired to look after the senile father in *A Separation*), the biddable Rouhi is treated as a convenience, exploited by both husband and wife, without regard for her feelings or needs. And once again a child is the prime victim of the parents' self-obsessed squabbling. The final eruption of conflagrations and explosions on the nocturnal Tehran streets, looking more like a riot than a celebration, seems an index of Farhadi's caustic take on Iranian society.

Disc: A clean, crisp transfer; minimal extras.

GUEST WIFE

Sam Wood; USA 1945; Olive Films/Region 1 DVD NTSC; 90 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

An independently produced post-screwball mini-*Ronde* of gender intrigue released just over a week before the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima, Sam Wood's lovely romcom is paradigmatically contingent on lies and misunderstandings: Claudette Colbert and Dick Foran are a happily married small-town couple whose lives are intermittently invaded by the needs of Foran's world-travelling, bestselling-journalist buddy Don Ameche. Just as Colbert's worried missus fears, when the couple set out for a second honeymoon in Manhattan, Ameche's fast-talking go-getter shows up and eventually admits that during his last trip to south-east Asia he began a series of lies to his publisher boss about having gotten married – using Colbert's photograph. Her disdain for her husband's friend notwithstanding, Colbert's Everywoman is roped into being the stand-in – which right from the start becomes an absurd New York publicity circus that can't be quelled.

The script, by opportunist-journeymen Bruce Manning and John D. Klorer, gamely embraces implicit gags about polygamy, wife-swapping and *ménages à trois*, as the situation is observed by Manhattanites ignorant of the ridiculous truth. Gradually the game complicates itself – Colbert decides to gain control over the mess by pretending to Ameche that she actually loves him, and from there it's a nuanced and hectic mystery about Who Realises Who Is Faking What.

Wood for his part shoots the action with single-camera-sitcom simplicity and does what he does



Last man: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*

best, tooling and micro-honing the dialogue's timing, so that the lines muttered quickest are the funniest. The story's pre-feminist sensibility can be read as either progressive (Colbert's exasperated autonomy is never questioned) or reactionary (in a sense she remains a toy tossed from man to man) and ends up being neither.

Disc: Adequate vault print, with some trampling visible. No extras.

INTOLERANCE

D.W. Griffith; USA 1916; Cohen Film Collection/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD NTSC; 197 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: essays, interview with Kevin Brownlow, 1919 features edited out of 'Intolerance' ('The Fall of Babylon'; 'The Mother and the Law')

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

The Moloch of cinéaste good intentions, the first great juggernaut of auteur ambition and the largest experimental film ever made, D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* is such an edifice in the landscape that addressing it anew is like summarising the Parthenon. But this restoration offers the most awesome presentation of the film seen anywhere since its initial theatrical run (which lasted, on and off, into the 1920s), despite the fact that it may or may not contain all the available footage affiliated with the project, since Griffith tinkered with it for years afterwards, adding happy-ending shots and excising nudity, and eventually breaking the whole megillah down for parts and mustering two separate features, included here, out of the fragments.

If your experience of it has previously been weathered 16mm prints or public-domain VHS copies, then this new digital makeover will be a breath-taker, from the first modern-day ballroom scene (a deep-set composition learned from Feuillade and then tripled in size) to the Brueghelian crowd scenes to the famous Babylon set, which remains stupefying and far more impressive than the entirety of *The Lord of the Rings* simply if not exclusively by virtue of being 100 per cent physically real.

The first siege of Babylon by the Persians, particularly in the Dantean night scenes, is enough to make *Intolerance* a landmark of *mise en scène* spectacle, and if the Christ sequences and the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre thread are overshadowed, the bizarre weaving of the four narratives, leading to four separate climaxes, is an inspired achievement that, had it not been fashioned by the man who had just made *The Birth of a Nation*, would have seen no canonical arguments in the decades since.

Of course, the more tiresome Griffithisms are unavoidable – the laborious title-card explanations (some of them undiegetically bragging about the set design), the lame poetry, the preciousness of the modern-day sequence (even though Mae Marsh and the proto-Soviet evocation of the 1914 Ludlow Massacre are still unforgettable), the heaven-help-us dénouement and so on. But here, unlike *Birth*, the brilliance of the cinematic assault is overwhelming.

Disc: An amazing resurrection. The two additional sub-features included are historically necessary, but the phalanx of commentary is particularly appreciated, especially as provided by the august Kevin Brownlow, contextualising the film's production and reception – including how Lenin appreciated Griffith's semi-surreptitious dig at John D. Rockefeller – in his inimitably erudite manner.

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

Philip Kaufman; USA 1978; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray; 115 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: 'Discussing the Pod' roundtable with Kim Newman, Ben Wheatley and Norman J. Warren, audio commentary by Philip Kaufman, numerous interviews with cast and crew, original theatrical trailer, booklet with essay by David Cairns

Reviewed by James Bell

Philip Kaufman's "reimagining" of Don Siegel's classic sci-fi picture kicked off a spate of sci-fi films that reworked 1950s originals (*The Thing*, *The Blob*, etc), and his version is every bit as enjoyable and revealing of its times as its forebear. Where Siegel's film set the action in quintessential 1950s small-town America, here the extraterrestrial species, who set about replacing people with emotionless clones grown in pods, land in San Francisco – the implication being, in the anonymity of city life, would you notice if your neighbour was replaced by an alien?

As well as mixing moments of real fright with knowing comedy, the film feels very much a product of the new American cinema of the 1970s in the attention it pays to crafting characterisation of real depth (Donald Sutherland only one of a uniformly excellent cast that includes Brooke Adams, Leonard Nimoy, Veronica Cartwright and Jeff Goldblum). There's a vitality running through all aspects of the film, from the ingenious sound design to Michael Chapman's cinematography, alternately noir-ish in its skewed darkness, and *verité*-like in its handheld intimacy.

Disc: Arrow's Blu-ray boasts an immaculate 1080p HD transfer, and an abundance of extras, among them an engaging, if rather formless, conversation about the film between Kim Newman, Ben Wheatley and Norman J. Warren.



Television

AN AGE OF KINGS

BBC; UK 1960; Illuminations/Region 2 DVD; 964 minutes; Certificate E; 4:3; Features: retrospective documentary, 24-page booklet

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

Originally shown live fortnightly in 1960, this 15-part adaptation of the Shakespeare English history plays saw the BBC marking its broadcasting territory. With ITV no longer just the upstart yapping at its heels but actively gobbling up its market share, this large-scale production, with a cast of hundreds and expansive allocation of resources and time in the schedules, was a demonstration of strength, respectability, tradition and stability at a time of change. It was also intended to celebrate the opening of the new Television Centre at White City – although, as the building wasn't ready in time, the production had to relocate to the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith.

Set between 1398 and the accession of Henry VII in 1485, it provides adaptations of *Richard II*, *Henry V* and *Richard III* as well both parts of *Henry IV* and all three of the *Henry VI* plays. The running times range from 57 to 78 minutes each and, with the exception of an hour-long *Henry VI Part 1*, all plays are split across two episodes. Despite the confines imposed by its live staging within an all-studio space (there are no filmed inserts to either expand its scope or allow for transitions), this is often enthralling television.

The direction by Michael Hayes, while not quite eliminating the implied shadow of a proscenium arch, is inventive, resourceful and highly mobile, though action scenes such as the Battle of Agincourt prove impossible to stage convincingly. But this is an intimate production that privileges performance above all: Robert Hardy, somewhat in the mould of the young Olivier, is a passionate prince and a commanding king, and his naughty repartee with Judi Dench's Katharine of France is a delight; Eileen Atkins makes for a hypnotic Joan la Pucelle; and Sean Connery does especially well as a lusty Hotspur.

Available for the first time in the UK on home video, this important release is intended by Illuminations to launch a series of classic television theatre adaptations.

Disc: Spread across five discs, this handsomely produced box includes an informative and well-illustrated 24-page booklet by John Wyver. There is also a new, 14-minute interview with Tony Garnett, who acted in the company.

THE FOLLOWING – SEASON 1

Outerbanks Entertainment/Warner Bros/Fox; USA 2013; Warner Home Video/Region 2 DVD; 786 minutes; Certificate 15; 16:9; Features: audio commentaries, deleted scenes, extended pilot episode, 'making of' featurettes

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

A US federal agent barely escapes with his life and is left physically and mentally scarred after apprehending a serial killer. He returns to service when the killer's acolytes commit murders inspired by the writing of a Romantic poet. This is the plot of Thomas Harris's *Red Dragon*, but if you substitute Ryan Hardy (Kevin Bacon) for Will Graham, Joe Carroll (James Purefoy) for Hannibal Lecter and Edgar Allan Poe for William Blake, you pretty much have



An Age of Kings Originally shown live in 1960, this large-scale production was a demonstration of the BBC's strength and tradition at a time of change

the basic premise of this catch-and-release procedural from Kevin Williamson.

Despite some nice touches – the brief flashbacks filling out characters' backstories, the villain's true-crime account being written ahead of events – the show is hobbled by its failure to convey Purefoy's purported seductive charm as the Poe expert-turned-homicidal cult leader. Instead we get tiresome squabbles with Hardy over the woman they both love (this show definitely fails the Bechdel test) while an ineffectual FBI is bested by rent-a-baddies whose main claim to distinctiveness is that they may or may not be gay. The fiery double-bluff finale, also swiped from *Red Dragon*, sets up a second season.

Disc: Extras include a faux documentary about the cult, and in one of the commentaries Williamson promises to make the FBI appear less moronic in future. Shouldn't be too hard.

SPYSHIP

7 Network/The Entertainment Channel/BBC; UK 1983; Simply Media/Region 2 DVD; 317 minutes; Certificate 12; 4:3

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

In February 1974 the British trawler *Gaul* mysteriously sank off the north coast of Norway.

Tom Keene and Brian Haynes researched the rumours of espionage surrounding the event for the current-affairs series *This Week* and reimagined them into a novel about collusion between British and Soviet intelligence to cover up a nuclear accident.

Scriptwriter James Mitchell, creator of *Callan* and *When the Boat Comes In*, wisely keeps the plot but puts much more emphasis on the characters. Tom Wilkinson is the disaffected son of one of the crew who uses his journalistic background to uncover what really happened while re-establishing his roots back home with the help of a local woman, played with a beguiling mixture of charm and toughness by Lesley Nightingale. Peter Eyre, George Baker, Michael Aldridge and David Burke stand out as the posh spymasters, and the serial is at its best when contrasting their cool detachment with the anguish of the friends and families of the fishermen (including a young Jimmy Nail). The air of gloom is encapsulated by a tremendously cynical ending, not to be found in the original book, which still freezes the blood.

Disc: There are no extras in this modest release, which copes best with the film elements, the video occasionally looking somewhat flat. Ⓢ

New releases



THE LAND OF HOPE

Sono Sion; Japan 2012; Third Window/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 133 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: making-of documentary, trailers

Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

With the portentously titled *The Land of Hope*, it seems that the prolific Sono Sion is pitching at a more serious level than in his previous cult items *Love Exposure* (2008) and *Cold Fish* (2010). The first fictional feature made in reaction to the 2011 tsunami, *The Land of Hope* unfolds in an alternate near future in which the Fukushima meltdown is already a suppressed memory.

The film is set in a small rural community in the fictitious Nagashima Prefecture and focuses on the Ono family, who make their living dairy farming and growing vegetables. The family is divided in the aftermath of a new disaster by the arbitrary boundaries of the 20km evacuation zone: elderly parents Yasuhiko and Chieko (who is succumbing to senile dementia) doggedly refuse to leave their land, while their son Yoichi and his wife Izumi move to a surprisingly unsympathetic new community down the road. Discovering that she is pregnant, Izumi takes to wearing a radiation suit and clutching a Geiger counter during her visits to the supermarket. Before long, a relocation order arrives for the parents.

For all the noble intentions of keeping the plight of the disaster victims in the public eye, with the radioactive fallout of the damaged Fukushima power plant yet to settle, the film seems prematurely conceived. Polished yet somehow lacklustre and dramatically overstretched, it offers little insight or emotional engagement. Only in certain sequences – for example those set in the blasted landscape of the real-life disaster area, full of debris and upturned houses, or when the aged cattle farmer takes a gun to his herd – does Sono achieve the level of surreal poetry the subject requires.

Disc: A pristine transfer preserves the striking cinematography of Miki Shigenori. Extras include a 70-minute 'making-of' documentary directed by cast member Fukami Motoki, in which Sono is seen travelling to the disaster area, gathering material for his script and discussing the event's taboo nature in Japan; despite a tendency to mawkishness, it arguably offers a more unmediated experience of the terrible real-life tragedy, making one all the more aware of the level of Sono's misfire.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Rupert Julian; USA 1925; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 91 minutes; 1.19:1; Features: Lon Chaney documentary, reel from sound reissue, unsourced sequence, trailers, booklet, C4 souvenir programme (PDF)

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Gaston Leroux (1868-1927) was a prolific journalist and author but he's remembered today chiefly for one work, his sensation novel *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* of 1911, widely adapted for stage and screen. Much the same could be said for the New Zealand-born actor/director Rupert Julian; he made his name impersonating Kaiser Wilhelm II (in *The Kaiser; the Beast of Berlin*, 1918), besides directing a couple dozen shorts and three dozen features. But these days it's solely for the first screen version of *The*



Chaney reaction: *The Phantom of the Opera*

Phantom of the Opera that his name is known – and even then it's doubtful how much of surviving prints of the film are his work.

It was a troubled production. Julian and lead actor Lon Chaney had worked together before – Chaney played Reichskanzler Bethmann-Hollweg in *Beast*, which Julian also directed – but any rapport between them soon broke down. They communicated via an intermediary, cameraman Charles Van Enger, who told Kevin Brownlow: "Julian would tell me to tell Chaney to do something and Chaney would say, 'Tell him to go to hell. I'll do it the way I want to do it.'" Universal studio boss Carl Laemmle had anticipated another Chaney-starring smash hit to follow *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), but when initial previews were greeted with laughter and boos, Julian departed the production and reshoots were handed over to Chaney, Laemmle's nephew Ernst and Edward Sedgwick.

Further complications ensued when sound arrived two years later. It was decided to convert the film to a talkie, with new scenes being shot, alongside a new silent version for those cinemas not yet converted to sound. What's come down to us is a complex mishmash, with elements derived from the various versions. Given this confused genesis, it's surprising that the film works as well as it does.

Which, to be frank, isn't all that well. Julian was evidently no great shakes as a director, and several scenes are clumsily staged. The casting is weak: fluttery Mary Philbin makes a pallid heroine, and Norman Kerry lacks all charisma as her lover. But luckily we have Chaney – and the magnificent sets, courtesy of Ben Carré and Charles Hall. Chaney gives a sinuous, anguished performance and, as on *Hunchback*, devised his own makeup – the shot where his skull-like face is revealed remains one of cinema's great shock moments. The shadowy, labyrinthine depths of the Opéra's cellars, and its towering Grand Foyer, are conceived on an impressive scale; and the masked ball sequence, staged in the foyer in delicate early Technicolor, feels at once sinister and enchanting.

Disc: Some minor glitches don't detract from an impressive transfer. A lone surviving reel from the sound version and an unexplained 'man with lantern sequence' add curiosity value, but the standout extra is Kevin Brownlow's authoritative documentary on Chaney.

WEEKEND OF A CHAMPION

Frank Simon/Roman Polanski; USA/France 1972/2013; Universal/Region 2 DVD PAL; 90 minutes; 1.78:1

Reviewed by David Thompson

In the wake of *Senna* and *Rush*, there would seem to be a lusty new market for films dealing with the heady, dangerous days of 1970s Formula One car racing. However, the re-versioning of the documentary *Weekend of a Champion*, given a very limited cinema release in 1972 and only occasionally glimpsed on TV or VHS cassette since, owes more to the financial imperative of a lab enquiring of its producer Roman Polanski what they should do with the original negative. Back in 1968, Polanski had met Frank Simon at the Cannes Festival, where the American filmmaker was presenting his groundbreaking documentary about a New York drag queen competition, *The Queen*. Out of his passion for racing and his friendship with Jackie Stewart, Polanski hired Simon to make a film covering the 1971 Monaco Grand Prix, in which the charismatic Scot would be defending his championship title.

Stewart, filmed over three days, is followed everywhere by an excitable Polanski, who apparently did some of the shooting himself. The champion (the film culminates in his triumphant win) coasts confidently through the rock-star adulation surrounding drivers at that time, as he's pursued by photographers and autograph-seekers and wine and dined by the international jet set. More significantly, he is revealed to be a very precise and disciplined man behind the wheel, driving Polanski round the track and explaining exactly what is needed to negotiate the treacherously narrow streets of Monte Carlo and not spin off at tight bends or crash into perilously high kerbs. Clad only in white Y-fronts, he discusses over breakfast his Zen-like approach to driving fast cars, commenting of Polanski, "As a racing driver, you're a very good film director."

Mainly through Stewart's patient and devoted wife Helen, we learn about the ever-present danger of death, and the constant need to comfort widows and friends. These privileged moments and the threat of bad weather – Stewart is more oppressed by looming clouds than by anything else – make the uneventful final race something of an anticlimax. Polanski's new solution to this problem has been to tighten the editing (losing about ten minutes from the original) and add a coda in which director and driver are reunited in the same Monte Carlo hotel suite where they once enjoyed breakfast together. At 74, Stewart is still an engaging raconteur, detailing how much safer the sport is today – in his five-year period at the top, he lost more than 50 colleagues (we see some horrific crashes, wholly absent from the 1971 footage), while no Formula One driver has been killed in almost two decades. Polanski comments that he lost interest in motor racing with the death of the glamorous François Cevert, seen in the original film on the brink of racing stardom.

While no reference is made to the director's own remarkable record of survival, the unspoken text here is that sheer professional dedication, whether in sport or in art, counts for a great deal.

Disc: The original film has been judiciously restored and transferred. No extras. Ⓢ

Lost and found

THE HEARTBREAK KIDS

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Filmed among Seattle's teenage drifters and castaways in 1984, *Streetwise* is a bleakly bewitching portrait of life on the fringes

By Charlie Fox

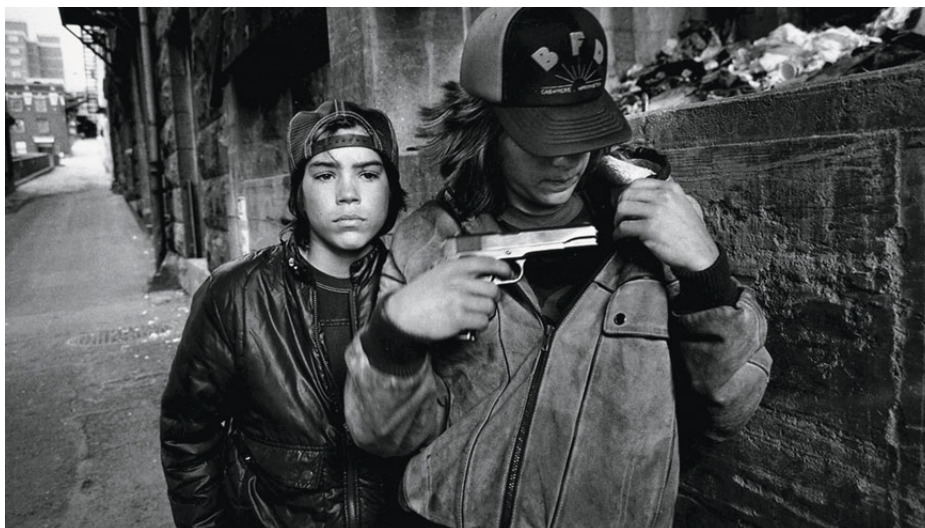
Streetwise (1984) is a heartbreaker. Nowhere else does adolescence look so bleak, so full of dreamy amorality and tranquillised despair, as in this vivid documentary about the grim lives of Seattle's street children. Some of the cast were murdered, others vanished and a few slid off into suburban inertia. The film is a strung-out prow through this inner-city underworld where children drift around like punk spectres.

For a film of such immense sadness to appear in the year that Ronald ("Facts are stupid things") Reagan was re-elected, after hollow talk about economic prosperity and the syrupy lullaby of his 'Morning in America' broadcasts, remains a brilliant counter-attack, a furious refusal of his dumb charm. But *Streetwise* (shot by Martin Bell alongside the photographer Mary Ellen Mark) is not a cautionary tale; it belongs among those rare works that couple hardcore political temper with a rich hallucinatory strangeness.

Though it was nominated for Best Documentary at the 1984 Oscars, it has slipped away into obscurity. It was released on video in the late 1990s and then vanished, reappearing now and then according to the erratic rhythms of online circulation. Gus Van Sant was obviously totally bewitched by it: that *vérité* scene of two hustlers telling tales in *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) is like a strictly queer recasting of its contents. Much of Harmony Korine's early work looks like a depraved love letter to its subjects; and David Gordon Green's *George Washington* (2000) is a more tranquil version of the same thing. A friend slipped it to me when I was 17 and, even through the toxic haze of decaying videotape, the film struck me like a sucker punch.

There's no triumphant arc to be traced across its running time – here life is supremely cruel but luckily very short. *Streetwise* seems to simply occur every time it's watched, following a graceful but utterly mysterious structure as it spans the dog days of summer to Halloween night. (A wonderfully sinister moment occurs when a hustler shakes hands with someone in a cartoon devil costume.) You can sense it turning colder all the time. The film's pulse is gentle and it causes a gasping shock, soon replaced by frightening numbness, like falling through a sheet of ice.

Some of the children are so young it's bewildering. They're probably the same age as the snottily wisecracking little kids running around the edges of John Hughes's *Sixteen Candles* (1984). Rat (you never learn his real name) is a scarcely teenage hobo whose antics play out like a stoned picaresque comedy. He tells us how to scam junk food from diners and sneak on to



Lost boys: *Streetwise*

It belongs among those rare works that couple hardcore political temper with a rich hallucinatory strangeness

freight trains. He might be a loveable little rascal if he weren't in possession of a stolen gun and a voice like dead leaves rustling. Tiny is a prostitute and a sly, lisping Cinderella, no more than 13, chewing bubblegum and badmouthing her pimp. She and Rat become a touching if hopeless couple towards the end of the film, performing a painful re-enactment of some doomed marriage.

There are flashes of squalid life: the swaggering teenage pimps who promise to protect two glum girls, or Shadow, the dead-eyed narcissist, describing his fantasy existence as a "playboy"

while slicking his hair in a mirror like a psychotic crooner. But there are many more eerily peaceful moments in which the film seems to swoon over its subjects. Its prologue is a breathless scene of nihilistic celebration in which Rat takes a slo-mo dive off a bridge at sunrise into a deep river. His narration sounds like the lyrics of some druggy seduction song: "The only bad part about flying is having to come back down to the fuckin' world." Soon afterwards he appears rollerskating through an abandoned building, all sorts of illicit chemicals giddily mixing in his blood.

Plenty of wicked mischief is scattered throughout the film, scenes bristling with raucous energy. *Streetwise* is also one of the few films that catch what the chronic boredom particular to adolescence is really like, not just its numb slouch but the deepest recesses of the feeling, akin to the slow disappearance of light from a room.

The children murmur along to the film, in voices intimate as late-night phone-calls, spun into a ghostly chorus: "He hit me so goddamn hard, when I woke up, man, it was dark"; "I wanna be really rich, diamonds and jewels... all that stuff"; "He said, 'Never come home' because he'd kill me, so when it all came down, I said, 'Oh, well...'". These fragments of glassy-eyed contemplation and daydream mumbling give the film a woozy mood that comes close to the poetic juvenilia in Terrence Malick's *Badlands* (1973) or *Days of Heaven* (1978). They're its real treasure.

The film's ending is the most miserable scene I know. One of the street-boys kills himself the night before his 17th birthday. Five people attend his funeral, including a policeman escorting his father. There's a wintry shot of the Washington State shoreline and Tom Waits sorrowing over a mournful brass band to a montage of street life. He cries, "I'm goin' up to see my Lord..." as the cast flicker away. They are some of the loneliest people ever put on film.

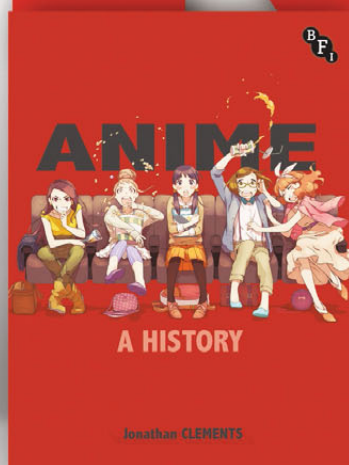
WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



'A grimly fascinating cinéma-vérité documentary about a bunch of kids living rough on Pike Street, Seattle... Saddest of all, given the raw deal they've had from the system, is the kids' unquestioning conservatism. All they want from life is a nice house, a colour TV, and a life-style that conforms to their soap opera ideals. The inevitable reservations aside (56 hours of footage reduced to 91 minutes; the occasionally voyeuristic camerawork), this is an impressive achievement.'

Nigel Floyd 'Time Out', 1984

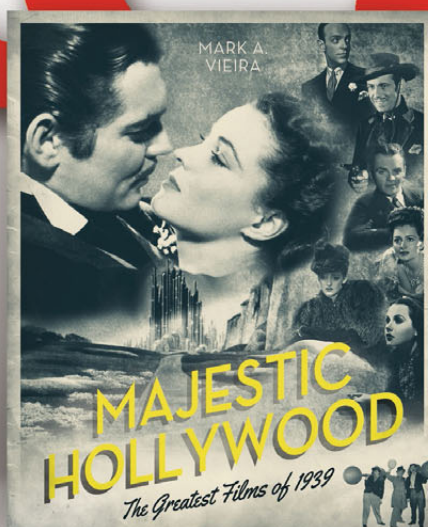
Read



ANIME: A HISTORY

By Jonathan Clements, BFI Publishing/
Palgrave Macmillan, 256pp, paperback,
£21.99, ISBN 9781844573905

Anime: A History is a comprehensive guide to the story of Japanese animation, tracing its development from the work of a handful of hobbyists in the 1910s to the Oscar-winning *Spirited Away* and beyond. Jonathan Clements explores the genre's production and reception history, taking into consideration cultural and technological developments of the past century. He addresses issues of historiography and covers neglected topics such as wartime instructional animation and work-for-hire for American clients. Drawing on the testimonies of industry professionals and Japanese-language documents, memoirs and books, *Anime: A History* illuminates the anime business from the inside – investigating its innovators, its unsung heroes and its controversies. www.palgrave.com/bfi

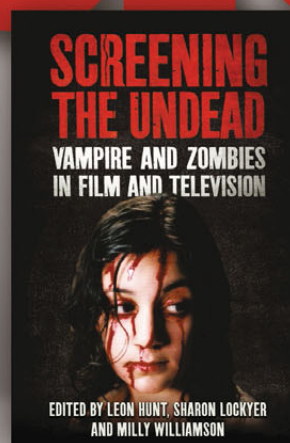


MAJESTIC HOLLYWOOD

The Greatest Films of 1939

By Mark A Vieira, Running Press,
223pp, paperback, illustrated,
£15.99, ISBN 9780762451562

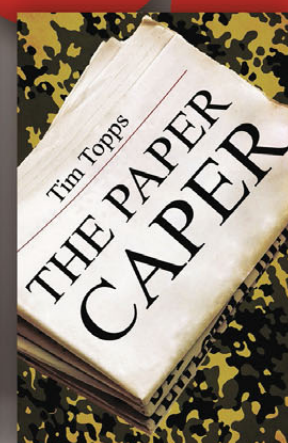
Majestic Hollywood showcases 50 films from a landmark year, with insightful text on the cultural significance of each movie, entertaining plot descriptions, and stories from the legendary artists who made the films: directors William Wellman and John Ford; cinematographers Arthur Miller and Lee Garmes; actors Judy Garland, Rosalind Russell, Ray Milland, Sir Laurence Olivier, and Olivia de Havilland. This world of entertainment is illustrated by rarely seen images, made during the most glamorous era in movie history – stills, behind-the-scenes candids, portraits and poster art. Presenting the best of these images and the stories behind them, this book is a cavalcade of unforgettable films from 1939: Hollywood's greatest year. <http://bit.ly/18LnVWV>



SCREENING THE UNDEAD

Vampires and Zombies
in Film and Television

Edited by Leon Hunt, Sharon Lockyer and Milly Williamson, IB Tauris, 288pp, paperback, £15.99, ISBN 9781848859241
Leading writers on horror and cult media consider the sexy vampire and the grotesque zombie, as well as hybrid figures who do not fit neatly into either category. These are examined across a range of contexts, from the Swedish vampire to the Afro-American Blacula, from the lesbian vampire to the gay zombie, from the Spanish Knights Templar riding skeletal horses to dancing Japanese zombies. *Screening the Undead* sheds new light on these two icons of terror – and desire – whose popular longevity has taken them 'beyond life'. www.ibtauris.com



THE PAPER CAPER

By Tim Topps, Matador Books, 200pp,
Ebook, £3.99, ISBN 9781783067749

PRODUCERS? DIRECTORS? Stand by your beds, if you are interested in Tim Topps's novel *THE PAPER CAPER* (and you should be, at a mere £3.99). The post-war memory of a Cold War army, when a green National Service subaltern is put in charge of a crummy newspaper to catch a super-spy. This light historical fiction takes an amusing look at life in an army depot full of staff visibly unwinding after the previous war. Much of the story will bring back memories for those called up in the years after Hiroshima...

For God's sake, understand that the British don't salute if they're bare-headed. Ever. Get it? (From Amazon or direct from Matador Books.) But get it right – for once. <http://bit.ly/1aBq5ud>



B movie *Babylon*: from politics to genre, Dante's career has maintained a consistent style and sensibility over more than three decades

AN AUTEUR HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

JOE DANTE

Edited by Nil Baskar and Gabe Klinger, FilmmuseumSynemaPublikationen (Vienna), £22.50, 256pp, ISBN 9783901644528

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

"Believe it or not, the present volume is the first comprehensive critical appraisal of Joe Dante's work in the English language," begins the preface to this long overdue book, a surprise given that Dante has been a critical darling for more than three decades. That said, there are several signs that the modest and self-deprecating director is less than comfortable with being at the centre of this kind of attention: he has only once sanctioned the possessive 'a film by' credit (for *Innerspace*, 1987), and that was under protest. However, it's hard to disagree with the notion that he's a classic auteur – regardless of their screenwriters and production

circumstances, his films constitute a remarkably coherent and consistent body of work. One could easily guess the director of, say, *Matinee* (1993) without advance warning, and not just because of onscreen appearances by his sometime screenwriter John Sayles and the legendary Dick Miller, the former Corman regular (*A Bucket of Blood*, 1959) who's appeared in virtually every Dante film as a sort of good luck mascot.

A glance at the contents page suggests that this is primarily a collection of essays (originally commissioned to accompany Dante retrospectives in Vienna and Ljubljana), although these only take up 100 pages in the mid-section. Bookending them are a lengthy, delightfully candid conversation with Dante conducted by co-editor Gabe Klinger that's the closest we currently have to a full-blown autobiography, a detailed timeline of his life and career, and a comprehensive annotated filmography. In short, it does an admirable job as a single-volume overview.

Of all the high-profile graduates of the so-called Roger Corman School of Film Technique, Dante stayed closest to his roots. He began as a trailer editor for Corman, and Sayles recalls marvelling at the sight of him operating an upright Movieola with hands and feet, filleting features down to two minutes of slam-bang action. This gave Dante an instinctive knowledge of precisely what he needed to shoot to create minimal wastage, which he was later able to parlay into his first professional feature *Hollywood Boulevard* (1976, co-directed by Allan Arkush), which made extensive use of Corman's stock footage library (with which Dante was all too familiar by then) to keep the budget as low as possible. Less than a decade later, he helmed his first and only blockbuster (*Gremlins*, 1984), whose huge success helped underwrite several films that remained remarkably personal despite being made squarely within the studio system – even obtaining creative freedom on the extraordinary *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* (1990) because Warner

Bros was so keen for a repeat performance.

Although the book gives plenty of space to the familiar titles (J. Hoberman devotes his essay to the *Gremlins* universe and its cultural-political tributaries), it also delves into the less travelled byways of Dante's output. Although its creator once claimed that the seven-hour found-footage mash-up *The Movie Orgy* (1966-2009) "doesn't amount to a hill of beans", it not only got him the Corman job in the first place but is the most graphic demonstration of Dante's voracious cinephilia: its contents include B movies, commercials, TV series and industrial films (basically, any old prints that could be salvaged and cut up), energetically recontextualised in a way that YouTube has made common currency over the last few years but which Dante was screening from the late 60s onwards.

His underrated TV work is also given its due: the series *Eerie, Indiana* (1991-2) gets an essay by Violeta Kovacsics while Klingner's article on Dante's 1990s work posits the HBO production *The Second Civil War* (1997) as the middle segment of an explicitly political trilogy, alongside 1993's *Matinee* and 1998's *Small Soldiers*. Dušan Rebolj, in an overview of motifs in Dante's work, devotes much space to the zombie allegory *Homecoming* (2005), Dante's first production for the *Masters of Horror* TV series. The second, *The Screwfly Solution* (2006), is cited in the essay 'Dante's Slashers', in which Bill Krohn

Of all the high-profile graduates of the so-called Roger Corman School of Film Technique, Dante stayed closest to his roots

traces "the blood-red artery running through Dante's work" – horror cinema having had a profound influence not only on obvious genre entries such as *Piranha* (1978) and *The Howling* (1980) but also *Hollywood Boulevard* (with its serial-killer plot motor) and *The 'Burbs* (1989).

Elsewhere, Christoph Huber explores *Looney Tunes: Back in Action* (2003), paradoxically a film d'auteur devoted to the expression of corporate might (since the film demanded Warner's involvement); Mark Cotta Vaz tackles the special effects in Dante's films, from primitive rubber monsters to state-of-the-art CGI (the book is extensively illustrated, including colour stills); and Michael Almereyda anticipates the realisation of *The Man with Kaleidoscope Eyes*, a film about Roger Corman's production of *The Trip* (1967) that was co-written by *S&S* contributor Tim Lucas – although rueful references to the legendarily unmade *Termite Terrace* (Dante's dream project: a tribute to the original Warner Bros cartoonists) warn us that we shouldn't get too excited about Dante films "coming soon" until they're actually playing in front of us. Still, his profile may be lower these days, but it's hearteningly clear from his recent dabblings in 3D (*The Hole*, 2009) and Netflix-sponsored webcasting (*Splatter*, 2009) that Dante's career is very much a case of "That's not all, folks!" ☺

HATCHET JOB

Love Movies, Hate Critics

By Mark Kermode, Picador, 312pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781447230519

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The press screenings Mark Kermode describes in *Hatchet Job* bring to mind the Vortex in John Boorman's *Zardoz* (1974), a refuge from history in which an elite of Eternals, or at least "stuffy, bespectacled, greying men", husbands the world's (film) knowledge while the Brutals maraud outside. London's Vortex, a handful of Soho screening rooms and Leicester Square cinemas, has scarcely changed in 80 years – though the nibbles aren't what they were – but the Brutals are becoming ever harder to ignore. They are of course the bloggers and tweeters and below-the-liners: Kermode's inciting incident is the bucketload of anonymous and pseudonymous hate he receives from *Observer* comment-boxers for liking *Twilight*. In his view "it is the risk to the critic's reputation and livelihood which ultimately lends weight to their words and ensures the integrity of the review". The Brutals have no good name to tarnish; and "writing for free in an arena where someone else is getting paid eventually undermines the possibility of anyone being properly remunerated".

It is hard to be moved by complaints about critics' quotes being displaced from movie posters by tweets, but Kermode has been misrepresented by Will Self, who wrote in the *Guardian* that Kermode is "unable to grasp the full extent of the change that's upon us". In fact, *Hatchet Job's* most valuable sections go beyond the generalised terms in which Self, striking an apocalyptic-modernist pose even older than the Vortex, treats the "mighty inundation of free content" supposedly threatened by the web. Whereas Self makes the dubious assertion that "the group amateur mind is indeed far more effective than the unitary perception of an individual critic", Kermode has troubled to look up close at the Brutals of Amazon customer reviews, finding not a mystical hive

mind but a numerically small aggregate of unpaid individuals. Indeed, in explaining how Amazon's system can be cheated, Kermode reveals a parallel world where names and reputations matter, even if there isn't any money in it.

And it is the removal of money from the critical equation, accompanying the collapse of the publishing industries, that is the real problem. (Puzzlingly Kermode characterises the principle of getting paid as "Trotskyist", but it is surely one of the more defensible parts of capitalism.) He and Self alike, negatively redolent of the 'Web 2.0' snake-oil salesmen of ten years ago or the thinkfluencers coming out of Silicon Valley now, probably overstate the disruptive significance of the "amateur" reviewers. It is easy to imagine salaried critics becoming extinct through a combination of economic necessity and neo-philistinism; less so to imagine their supersession by social media. As has been said elsewhere, Self's rhetorical sleight of hand is to confuse criticism with consumer advice. While social media may provide the latter, the next Dilys Powell will either write for money or keep her opinions to herself. (Or, as in Self's satirical short story 'A Short History of the English Novel', join the many thousands of talented *littérateurs* employed in catering.)

Kermode spends too much time on the question of anonymity, which was after all good enough for the *Times Literary Supplement* – perhaps because an opinion which really does risk the critic's reputation and livelihood may well be right. He is much stronger when expressing his doubts about life in the Vortex. Unlike literary critics, newspaper film critics on the whole need not worry about encountering their prey at parties; they do however have to spend quite a lot of time together, entailing a degree of civility less often observed in the book pages. Kermode voices his admiration for the *Evening Standard's* Alexander Walker, a right-wing renegade whom he "did not know well, even though I spent two days a week for donkey's years sitting with him in a darkened room".

Elsewhere he goes so far as to doubt the very institution of preview screenings, which are arranged to ensure reviews appear on the day of theatrical release, and impose on critics a demand for near-instant judgement – made yet more instantaneous by the invention of the smartphone. As Kermode says, sticking up for his old job as DVD reviewer, not only is the considered review better, but it is also "more relevant and influential" in an age when most film viewing is done at home. As for film festivals, hallowed dates in the Vortex calendar, where the nibbles are no doubt still spectacular, Kermode is of the "firm belief that everyone's critical faculties are screwed by the end of the first day, meaning that reviews filed (even by seasoned critics) from the madness of that filmy bun-fight are inherently suspect". Indeed the "crushing weight" of movies gets on top of him at home. More than once I discerned amid Kermode's defence of the professionals, diminished in number even since the book appeared, a yearning for the Vortex to be brought down. ☹

Mark Kermode



THE SHINING

By Roger Luckhurst. BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, BFI Film Classics. 104pp. £10.99. ISBN 9781844576395

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

The labyrinth on the cover of Roger Luckhurst's study of *The Shining* is a reminder that Stanley Kubrick, in making his 1980 horror puzzler, set out to entertain, disorient and confound. Luckhurst recounts the anecdote that Kubrick was frustrated by his crew getting lost in the maze he had constructed on set – then got lost in it himself. In fact, there's plenty to suggest that Kubrick was both captive and Minotaur in his own maze, that he is as much the film's monster as is doomed writer Jack Torrance; he famously terrorised his lead actress, Shelley Duvall, paralleling Jack's persecution of her character, Wendy. And Luckhurst makes the intriguing suggestion that Jack's obsessive typewritten text – “All work and no play” – is a representation of Kubrick's own notorious penchant for shooting multiple takes. (An alternative proposal of Luckhurst's, and one to tickle the film's literary fans, is the possibility that the closing shot's 1921 Jack is a modernist writer, author of *All Work and No Play*, a pioneering experimental text à la Gertrude Stein.)

The suggestion that *The Shining* is somehow ‘about’ Kubrick is merely one of the multiple possibilities aired in this survey of a famously multiple film. Luckhurst discusses the way that Kubrick's feature has become fertile ground for arcane paranoid analyses (as chronicled in Rodney Ascher's recent documentary *Room 237*). He himself offers an informed, measured reading that is labyrinthine in its own way, at once following



Always been here: *The Shining* still fascinates

the chronological flow of the film (and its variant release versions) and illuminating the different critical and historical contexts in which the film can be seen. He covers the early incomprehension of and attacks on the film, including one from Brian De Palma, infuriated with auteurs who muscle in on genre territory; and he looks at *The Shining*'s place in the field of 70s and 80s horror, showing why the film can at once disappoint those with genre expectations and at the same time prove remarkably rich and troubling as a film that “bathes in borrowed tropes”.

Another historical perspective is that of 70s anxieties about childhood in peril and as a source of peril, exemplified by demon-child films such as *The Omen* and a memo of Richard

It's possible that Kubrick was both captive and Minotaur in his own maze, as much the film's monster as Jack Torrance

Nixon's psychotherapist proposing that all seven- and eight-years-olds be tested for homicidal tendencies. Luckhurst also notes the treatment of Scatman Crothers's ill-fated character Halloran, examining him in the context of the stereotype that has come to be known as the ‘Magical Negro’.

Luckhurst makes insightful use of the film's history and the vagaries of its cutting, notably the disappearance of certain sections and characters, leaving a sort of palimpsest trail that shows traces of Kubrick's editing decisions. He's particularly good at showing why the film's style and texture have such a troubling effect, notably on the disorienting editing of the Room 237 sequence as gesturing towards what he calls a “telepathic cinema” and “a new way of navigating cinematic intersubjectivity”.

At the outset, Luckhurst proposes to offer new resources for seeing *The Shining* in a fresh light. I'm not sure that he entirely achieves this, given that one doesn't come away with a radically new interpretation of the film. What Luckhurst does offer, however, is a cogent and thorough review of key topics, including insightful appraisals of Jack Nicholson's controversially excessive performance and Kubrick's soundtrack use of Ligeti, Penderecki *et al*. Most importantly, Luckhurst is under no illusions about the film's shortcomings and refreshingly clears away the vapours of mystificatory awe that too often surround *The Shining* and Kubrick's work in general. At the same time, he eloquently conveys his enthusiasm for a film that is certainly like no other, and that he sees as a prime example of “secular horror”, a mode that “offers a glimpse of the absolute nothingness that lies beneath the maze of appearance”. Whether or not you subscribe to this view, Kubrick's maze remains tantalisingly open, and Luckhurst's book is a compelling invitation to explore further. **S**

THE INNOCENTS

By Christopher Frayling. BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, BFI Film Classics. 120pp. £10.99. ISBN 9781844573431

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

With the runaway commercial and critical success of his first feature, *Room at the Top* (1958), Jack Clayton found himself – rather to his distaste – aligned with the gritty northern realism of the British New Wave. Determined to avoid typecasting, he unhesitatingly rejected the offer of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and looked around for a project as different as possible from his previous film. What he hit upon was a work that had first impressed him when he read it aged 10: Henry James's insidious ghost story *The Turn of the Screw*, in which a Victorian governess comes to believe that the children in her charge are possessed by the ghosts of two servants, a valet and the previous governess, lovers who died violent deaths.

James described his story as “a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation, an *amusette* to catch those not easily caught”. But as so often, trust the tale, not the teller. Not only is *The Turn of the Screw* neither pure nor simple, there's a subtle and troubling eroticism to it that undercuts any coldness or calculation. James's mandarin prose creates levels

of ambiguity, layers upon layers, as Clayton hinted in a note to his first screenwriter, William Archibald: “I think one has to tackle this whole film rather as though it was a strange detective story... rather like peeling an artichoke.”

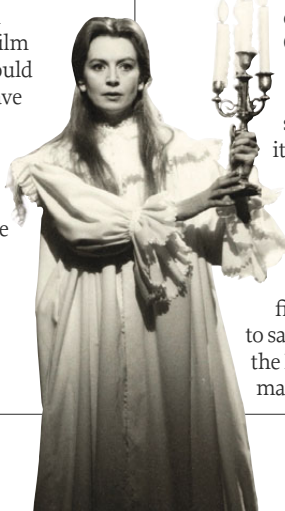
Christopher Frayling records Clayton's determination to remain faithful to the essence of his source, calling in John Mortimer and then Truman Capote when Archibald's script proved “over-dialogued” and fending off pressure from worried front-office types – not least Fox studio head Spyros Skouras – angling for a happy (or at least less disturbing) ending. The fluidity of James's style, the indirections, evasions and half-stifled hints, would be reflected in slow, intricate dissolves between scenes, often involving not two but three – or even, at one juncture, as Frayling points out, four – images layered over each other.

This ambiguity, visual no less than narrative, would be as central to the film as it is to the story. The possibility should always be left open that the ghosts have been conjured up in the mind of the governess, Miss Giddens (Deborah Kerr) – that she, as Clayton put it in his initial notes for the film, “more or less creates the situation”. She alone would see the ghosts – whether the children also saw them would never be certain. Clayton aimed, Frayling suggests, for “a sense of incompleteness

about his ghosts”, who would always be distanced from us, glimpsed through glass or some way off over water. Discussing the score with composer Georges Auric, Clayton explained that he wanted to create an initial atmosphere that wasn't “too sinister and menacing – the whole point here should be to mislead the audience”.

Audiences, apparently, weren't too impressed by these tactics. *The Innocents* performed poorly on its release, possibly thanks to tepid reviews: critics generally found it either too explicit – the ghosts shouldn't have been visible by daylight, some complained – or not scary enough. The *New York Times* wrote it off as “mild and ingenuous”, a view later echoed by David Thomson, who dismissed Clayton as a purveyor of “neatly

wrapped up and faintly realised exercises in literary emotion” and described *The Innocents* as “an Arts Council-like piece of Jamesiana”. Pauline Kael demurred, calling it “the best ghost movie I've ever seen” and one “that honors its sources”, praising it for its “elegance and literacy... beauty and ambiguity”. Others have agreed, among them Truffaut and Scorsese – and of course Frayling, who ventures that the film, “sacrilegious as it may seem to say it – even managed to *improve* on the Henry James original”. His book makes a good case for the sacrilege. **S**



Peeling the artichoke: Deborah Kerr

SUBSCRIBE!



INCLUDES
FREE
DIGITAL
EDITION

PRINT

- £45 (UK) – save £9 on the cover price!
- Get **FREE** access to the digital edition on your desktop, tablet and mobile devices



NOW
ON
KINDLE
FIRE

DIGITAL

- Only £30 for an annual subscription!
- Includes text-search and video, plus access to a two-year archive of back issues

80-YEAR
ARCHIVE
OF FILM
CRITICISM



THE SIGHT & SOUND AND MFB DIGITAL ARCHIVE

- The complete 80+ year archive of both titles – desktop access only
- Includes text-search, video, bookmarks and clippings
- Available to subscribers only – for an additional £20 per year

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND CUSTOMER ENQUIRIES:

Visit: bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/subscribe
Email: sightandsound@alliance-media.co.uk

Telephone: +44 (0)20 8955 7070
Demo: sightandsounddigital.bfi.org.uk

APP AVAILABLE FOR iOS, ANDROID + KINDLE FIRE





REGENT'S
UNIVERSITY LONDON
School of Drama, Film & Media

Develop the skills you need to gain paid commissions for television, film and theatre

MA Writing for Screen & Stage

Led by award winning scriptwriter David Hanson
BAFTA, Ace and Golden Rose of Montreux awards.

- › Two-year part-time degree
- › Combination of on-campus and distance learning
- › One-to-one script tutoring throughout the course
- › Scholarships available

Course starts June 2014
Apply now

T 020 7487 7505 E exrel@regents.ac.uk W regents.ac.uk/mawss

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

Postgraduate opportunities in Film

Tim Bergfelder

Shelley Cobb

K.J. Donnelly

David Dunn

Mike Hammond

Anne Hogan

Sally Keenan

Lucy Mazdon

Veronica Spencer

Linda Ruth Williams

Michael Williams

Pam Cook

(Professor Emerita)

Film Studies at Southampton has an international reputation for cutting edge research and a thriving community of postgraduate students.

MA Film Studies

This programme provides an intensive introduction to methods of research and analysis in film history and theory. You will study Hollywood, European and non-Western styles of filmmaking. Excellent resources facilitate individually tailored research, while core modules ensure a solid foundation in the field.

MA Film & Cultural Management

This programme is suited to those who want to add a knowledge of the business of film to their academic study. Drawing on the expertise of film and cultural management professionals, this course offers an opportunity to study cultural policy with a focus on the film industry and related institutions.

For further details please contact: Recruitment and Admissions Office, Humanities, University of Southampton SO17 1BF
Tel: +44 (0)23 8059 6809 | pgafh@southampton.ac.uk | www.southampton.ac.uk/film/postgraduate

MPhil/PhD Film Studies

Our staff offer supervision in a wide range of research areas, including: American Cinema, British and European Cinema, World Cinema, Film Aesthetics, Film Theory, Film Industry and Film Policy, Popular Cinema, Star Studies, Cult Films, Music in Film and Television, and Science Fiction and Horror films.

International Applicants

Alongside traditionally structured PhDs, we offer flexible, individually tailored modes of study, which are designed specifically for international students. These include a four-year Integrated PhD, and a distance learning route. Contact us if you would like to know how these could benefit you.

Studentships are available at PhD and MA level on a competitive basis, in addition to several bursaries, please enquire for further details.

Up to Three Full Studentships on Offer!

Additional fee waivers and partial scholarships may be available

JOIN one of the top three Film Studies departments in the UK*; the highest performing department in Scotland, in any discipline*; one of the largest PhD programmes in Film Studies.

RESEARCH transnational film cultures, film and history, sexuality and identity, film festivals, documentary, early cinema, non-Western, European and Hollywood cinemas.

CONTRIBUTE to conferences and symposia (film and history, film festivals, open access film studies, war and cinema, film and ethics), student film festivals (60 Hour Film Blitz), the new graduate student journal Frames and the acclaimed *Film Festival Yearbook* series.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

www.st-andrews.ac.uk/filmstudies

Director of Postgraduate Studies, Film Studies,
101A North Street, St Andrews, Fife, KY16 9AD, Scotland, UK

T: +44 (0)1334 467473

E: filmstudies@st-andrews.ac.uk

The University of St Andrews is a charity registered in Scotland: No SC013532

Prof Robert Burgoyne
Prof Richard Dyer (*Professorial Fellow*)
Jean-Michel Frodon (*Professorial Fellow*)
Dr Elisabetta Girelli
Dr Dennis Hanlon
Prof Dina Iordanova
Dr Brian Jacobson
Dr Tom Rice
Dr Leshu Torchin
Dr Joshua Yumibe

*The Second Century
of Film Studies
Begins Here!*

* 2008 Research Assessment Exercise

Film and Television Studies

Film and Television Studies at the University of Warwick has a worldwide reputation for the quality of its teaching and research within the fields of film and television aesthetics, history and theory.

It was the first completely free-standing Film and Television department in the UK with all its resources being devoted to the intensive study of the two media.

- Housed in a new multi-million pound study centre equipped with 35mm, 16mm and high definition 2K digital projection facilities.
- Outstanding subject-specific print, electronic and audiovisual library resources and a dynamic international research culture with an ongoing programme of research seminars, symposia and conferences.
- Top Film and Television Studies Department in the UK in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise.
- Top Film and Television Studies department in The Times Good University Guide 2012 and the Complete University Guide 2012-2013.

MA Modules include:

Screen Cultures and Methods; The City in Film and Television; History and Memory in Italian Cinema; Journeys and Landscapes in Film and Television; Sound Cultures; Television History and Aesthetics; Textual Analysis and Film Style.

Staff: José Arroyo; Charlotte Brunsdon; Stella Bruzzi; Jon Burrows; Catherine Constable; Ed Gallaferri; Stephen Gundle; James MacDowell; Rachel Moseley; Alastair Phillips; Michael Pigott; Karl Schoonover; Helen Wheatley.

Research Degrees:
MPhil/PhD in Film and/or Television Studies.

Master's Degrees:
MA in Film and Television Studies
MA for Research in Film and Television Studies

Contacts:

Email: H.J.Hares@warwick.ac.uk

Online: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/film/postgrads/>

Funding Opportunities for 2014

The University of Warwick's Chancellor's Scholarships are available for excellent doctoral candidates. Details are available at:

www.warwick.ac.uk/go/gsp

For 2014/15 the Department is offering two MA bursaries (application deadline 1st April 2014). Further details:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/film/applying/postgraduate/fees/>

NEW YORK FILM ACADEMY

School of Film • Acting • Television • Producing • Photography

WWW.NYFA.EDU | +1-212-674-4300

**THE MOST HANDS-ON
INTENSIVE PROGRAMS
IN THE WORLD**

**ONE & TWO-YEAR
CONSERVATORY**

**TWO-YEAR
MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

**ONE-YEAR
MASTER OF ARTS**

BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS

ASSOCIATE OF FINE ARTS

SHORT-TERM INTENSIVE WORKSHOPS

*In the first year,
each student writes,
shoots, directs, and
edits 8 films in the most
intensive hands-on
program in the world
and works on the crew
of 28 additional films*

16mm • 35mm • Hi-Def • **RED EPIC®** • Super 16mm • HD SLR

NEW YORK CITY • LOS ANGELES, SHOOTING ON THE BACKLOT OF UNIVERSAL STUDIOS • ABU DHABI, UAE
AUSTRALIA • FLORENCE • SOUTH BEACH • HARVARD UNIVERSITY* • DISNEY STUDIOS* • PARIS* • JAPAN* • KOREA* • CHINA* • INDIA*

All MFA, BFA, MA, and AFA degree programs are offered at the New York Film Academy Los Angeles. All degree programs take place on the backlot of Universal Studios, Hollywood. All workshops are solely owned and operated by the New York Film Academy and such workshops are not affiliated with Universal Studios, Harvard University, or Disney Studios. *Summer Only.



READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

OUR FRIEND IN THE NORTH

I would just like to salute the quality of your coverage of *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (S&S, December). Sophie Mayer has become one of my favourite S&S reviewers, and her analysis was as thought-provoking and incisive as always, while Jonathan Romney's interview wrestled with the issues in a typically thoughtful way. Between them, they framed the film wonderfully well, but I enjoyed their coverage even more after seeing it myself, when I felt as if I had the company of two brilliant friends to discuss it with all over again. Thank you.

Mat Felix Durham

CZECH MASTER

I enjoyed Kim Newman's review of the 1963 film *Ikarie XB 1* very much (Home Cinema, S&S, November), but in comparing the film with *The End of August at the Hotel Ozone* (1966), he missed out one significant detail: both films were written by the maverick (and quite brilliant) scriptwriter and filmmaker Pavel Juráček. While *Ikarie XB 1* does perhaps show one or two traces of Communist party influence, the majority of the output associated with his name is rather more anti-authoritarian in tone.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, his refusal to toe the line after the reversal by the Communist authorities of the creative freedoms afforded by the Prague Spring of 1968 led to Juráček finding himself barred from working in Czech cinema. He died, heartbreakingly, just before the Velvet Revolution that might well have seen his welcome and long overdue return into the cinema fold.

Barnabas Netherwood By email

UNSUNG HERO

It may be true that a prophet has no honour in his own country, and that could explain why our greatest British filmmaker of the last 33 years, Peter Greenaway, remains largely unheralded in the UK. We live in an era when all sorts of minor films from the archives are deemed fit for release on DVD. So why is Peter Greenaway's 2012 film *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* still awaiting a DVD release date? Is this connected to the multi-source funding arrangements his films have to endure? Does it stem from a prejudice against his painterly and truthful representation of human nature, political oligarchies and sex and death in favour of kitchen-sink vapidness? Or is he simply a casualty of the widespread stupidification of the film-watching public in the era of consumerism? Any ideas?

Kieron Boote Stoke-on-Trent

ONE FROM THE HEART

I am most grateful for Philip Kemp's thoughtful and sensitive review of my book, *A Wonderful Heart: The Films of William Wyler* (S&S, January). Perhaps I might be permitted to add that the book's title (which Mr Kemp didn't care for) is an actual quote about Wyler from David Lean, specifically when describing Fredric March's

LETTER OF THE MONTH WAYS OF SEEING



In her review of Abdellatif Kechiche's *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (S&S, December), Sophie Mayer repeatedly uses the outmoded 1970s term 'male gaze' without explaining what kind of man she has in mind. Some 40 years after Laura Mulvey coined that expression, it should be obvious to anybody that straight, gay and asexual men look

differently at women, and that even within these groups there is no fixed gaze. The term is biologist. Worst of all, by insisting that "a follow-cam trained on Adèle from behind" betrays a male gaze, Mayer denies the possibility that a woman filmmaker might have celebrated her actresses in a similar way. Frank Noack Berlin

homecoming in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), but more generally reflecting Lean's veneration of Wyler as a man and as a filmmaker. As the review notes, Andrew Sarris's influential criticism of Wyler's so-called contemplative cinematic 'coldness' had held sway for long enough. I wanted the title immediately to foreground a contrary perception, and also highlight a truly heartfelt tribute of one great director to another.

Neil Sinyard University of Hull

PICTURE PERFECT

I'd like to express utmost joy at seeing Bong Joonho's original pre-production sketch ('Blockage on the line', S&S, January). The presence of such behind-the-scenes material, straight from the director's hand, is so much more impactful than typical PR 'bullshots' – something S&S already avoids, commendably. So, in short: more please.

David Valjalo Liverpool

LOVE IN A COLD CLIMATE

Hannah McGill's piece on sex and clothing in *The Piano* was thought-provoking in relation to life as well as art. For readers of a certain age, getting one's kit off is surely connected to the rise of central heating, which transformed lovemaking possibilities for a whole generation. And so the initial lovemaking in *Beloved*, for example, is not merely realistic, but also almost painfully moving in the participants' clumsily modest pushing to one side of only the minimum necessary to make sex possible. On the other hand, Isabelle Huppert's constant disrobing in *Heaven's Gate*, however dubiously pleasurable

for the male viewer, is nullified by two factors: the setting and the fact that the character is a prostitute. Minimal removal is surely the only convincing mode in that context.

Grahame Smith Gargunnoch, Stirling

LIFE ON THE GAME

It's amazing how fully Ginette Vincendeau fails to understand François Ozon's superb *Jeune & jolie* (S&S, December). To a more sympathetic viewer, it's perfectly obvious why 17-year-old Isabelle ventures into prostitution. It offers an escape (initially, at least) from her smug bourgeois family and a first step (however problematic) in a quest for her own identity.

Nor does Ms Vincendeau seem to realise that prostitution is a powerful fantasy for many people who may never actually engage in it. She prefers to blame Ozon's "self-serving patriarchal assumption that 'women' are yearning for passivity". Almost as if Ozon – France's most illustrious gay auteur, renowned for his nuanced roles for women – were some sort of Humbert Humbert, in hot pursuit of young female flesh!

David Melville Edinburgh

Additions and corrections

December p.61 *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* film extracts: *Enter the Void* (2010) (audio only), *Die Büchse der Pandora/Pandora's Box* (1928); p.71 *Day of the Flowers*, Cert 15, 99m 28s, 8,952 ft +0 frames; p.77 *Gravity*, USA/Mexico/United Kingdom (we omitted Mexico)
January p.71 *Big Bad Wolves*, Cert 18, 109m 53s, 9,889 ft +8 frames; p.82 *Klown*, Cert 18, 93m 27s, 8,410 ft +8 frames; p.83 *Life's a Breeze*, Cert 15, 83m 23s, 7,504 ft +8 frames; p.88 *The Missing Picture*, Cert 12A, 95m 47s, 8,620 ft +8 frames; p.87 *The Patience Stone*, Cert 15, 102m 19s, 9,208 ft +8 frames; p.88 *The Railway Man*, Cert 15, 116m 26s, 10,479 ft +0 frames; p.89 *Rough Cut*, Cert 15, 90m 0s, 8,100 ft +0 frames; p.91 *This Ain't California*, Cert 15, 100m 17s, 9,025 ft +8 frames

KISS ME DEADLY



The final scenes of the *noir* classic are a rare example of a studio imposing an even bleaker ending than its filmmaker had intended

By Kim Newman

In a sense, Robert Aldrich's inside-out adaptation of Mickey Spillane's novel – scripted by A.I. Bezzerides – begins with its ending. The opening titles crawl down from the top of the screen, as if the end credits were being run backwards. Considering what happens in the climax, it's possible time-space is put out of joint by a nuclear physics event – or a cosmic supernatural crisis of Lovecraftian proportions – and all of reality is rolled up or burned away to make way for a new void. All this in a thick-ear private eye thriller.

Many mysteries abound in the last reel of *Kiss Me Deadly* – including the fact that a film awash with sinister and high-handed government and criminal conspiracies ostensibly offers a rare instance of faceless studio interference imposing a bleaker, more radical ending on the filmmakers' slightly less shocking vision.

After a tangle of violence and mystery, characterised as a battle with the mysterious "They" over a search for "the great whatsit", private eye Mike Hammer (Ralph Meeker) learns that his secretary Velda (Maxine Cooper) is prisoner in a Malibu beach house. Throughout the film, the evil mastermind has been seen only as a pair of natty shoes and pinstriped trousers – he cautions Hammer not to look at his face: "Who would you see? Someone you do not know." Now, without the detective present, the camera pans up from those shoes to reveal Dr Soberin (Albert

Dekker), the man you don't know, as he potters about the house, packing his bags. In a mystery, such sleight is usually a set-up for the reveal that someone you do know but didn't suspect is the killer. Here, the solution is a throwaway.

In Spillane's book, the great whatsit was a case full of drugs. Here, it's something else. Hammer's cop associate (Wesley Addy) warns him off with a few words: "Manhattan Project, Los Alamos, Trinity." The box, stashed in a locker in the Hollywood Athletic Club, is warm to the touch; anyone who opens it glimpses a blinding light and sustains burns. Dr Soberin's duplicitous minion Gabrielle (Gaby Rodgers, in her only studio film, is unforgettably demented), becomes fascinated with it. Like Spillane's novels, the film is littered with disposable gangland women who come on to Hammer: they have character names like 'Cheesecake' and 'Friday'. Soberin mistakes the pixie-ish Gabrielle for one of these peripheral specimens and ignores her until she shoots him in the gut. Just after the chief villain has been defeated by someone else, Hammer charges in to the rescue. He gets gut-shot too, falling out of frame like a prop.

The box must contain fissionable material but Soberin, even as he dies, keeps talking in mythic metaphors: Pandora, the head of the Medusa, Lot's wife, Cerberus at the gates of hell. If Gabrielle were better read, maybe she'd live... though the film's first victim (Cloris Leachman) knows Christina Rossetti and listens to classical

Ralph Meeker is so repulsive as Mike Hammer that few in the audience would mind him not making it to a happy ending

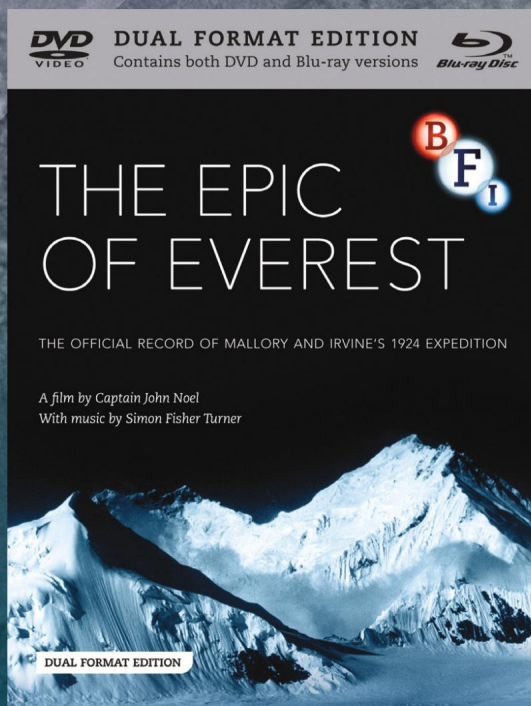
music, and culture doesn't help her survive. Of course, Gabrielle opens the box – out of curiosity as much as greed – and becomes a pillar of fire.

Here's what Aldrich and Bezzerides intended. As Gabrielle screams and burns, Hammer revives, frees Velda and the couple stumble out of the house and into the waves, watching the whole place explode in a science-fiction-tinged atomic apocalypse. For UK release, where much of the earlier violence was trimmed, this is what happens... as it does in the now-restored director's cut. There's an ambiguity. It's possible that Gabrielle has started a chain reaction that will consume Malibu, California or all creation. Or maybe Mike and Velda are doomed to slow, steady deaths from radiation poisoning.

The cut of the film released in America, at the height of Spillane's popularity, omits 80 seconds of footage, leaving the hero and heroine in the house and suggesting they are both consumed in the explosion, which continues under the end title. Aldrich always said this wasn't what he wanted, but never revealed who overruled him – indeed, his contract specified that his decisions couldn't be revoked.

Aldrich and Bezzerides make Hammer an unpleasant thug, faithfully representing the sadism of Spillane's character and embodying his conservatism and misogyny – though he's sleazier and less of a moralist. The film is plainly as much an attack on its source as an adaptation of it. Killing Hammer wouldn't be expected, but Meeker is so supremely repulsive that few in the audience would mind him not making it to the waves and a happy ending. Still, Mike Hammer was a major draw in 1955... imagine if *Jack Reacher* ended with Tom Cruise casually killed and swept aside as an irrelevance. Yet, that's what someone – a mysterious "they" – decreed for *Kiss Me Deadly*. **S**

'The Epic of Everest must be seen'



★★★★★
FINANCIAL TIMES

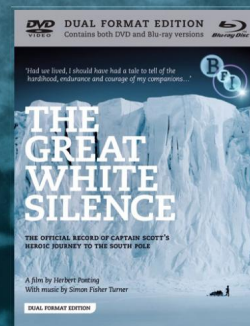
★★★★★
THE GUARDIAN

★★★★★
DAILY TELEGRAPH

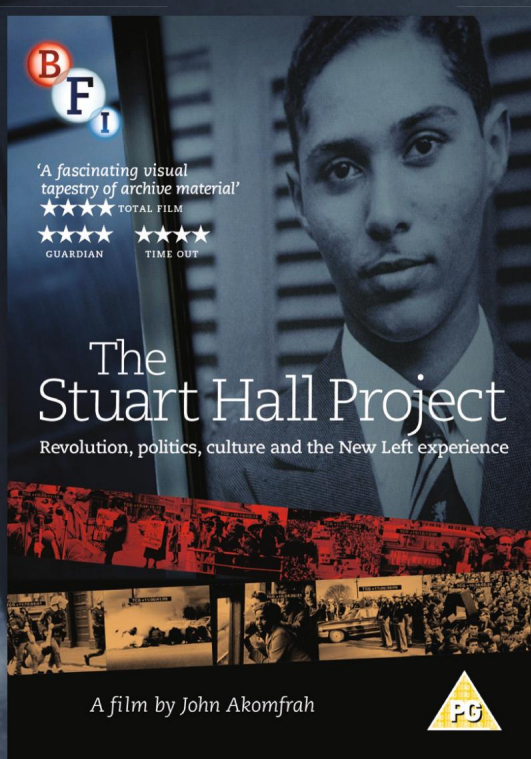
★★★★★
THE TIMES

★★★★★
TOTAL FILM

Also available



'A stirring documentary'



★★★★★
TIME OUT

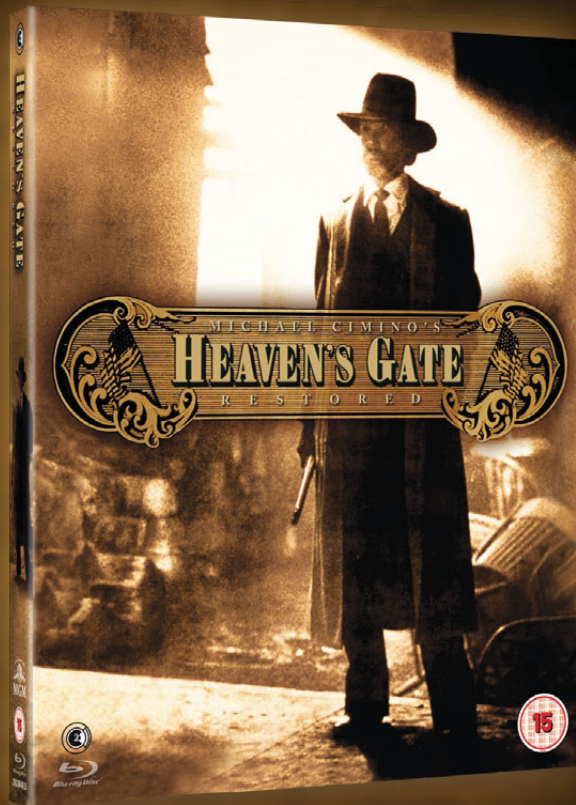
★★★★★
THE GUARDIAN

★★★★★
TOTAL FILM

★★★★★
EVENING STANDARD

★★★★★
LITTLE WHITE LIES

MICHAEL CIMINO'S
HEAVEN'S GATE
R E S T O R E D



THE TELEGRAPH



CINEVUE



TIME OUT



EMPIRE



LITTLE WHITE LIES

ON  AND 

AVAILABLE NOW

Find us at  /SecondSightFilms
for our latest release news, updates and giveaways

SECOND SIGHT
www.secondsightfilms.co.uk

 amazon.co.uk

Free Super Saver Delivery and Unlimited One-Day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available.
Terms and Conditions apply. See Amazon.co.uk for details.